

# **Media Discourses on the Interlinking of Rivers in India**

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## **Summary**

In 1954 India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru proclaimed dams to be the "temples of modern India". Based on the theses that this "developmental imagination" so visible in Nehru's statement continues to be a prominent feature in discourses on large scale infrastructure projects in India until today, and that the media plays an important role in shaping these public discourses, the dissertation considers the question of how large scale water infrastructure schemes are covered within the Indian media landscape. To answer that question, a media analysis is conducted which focuses on the reporting on the Indian National River Linking Project (NRLP) and on two schemes being implemented under the NRLP: The Ken-Betwa and the Polavaram Dam Projects.

The 168-billion-dollar NRLP project is the world's largest water project in the making and includes the construction of several dams. It is designed to connect the majority of Indian rivers to a gigantic water grid. It is controversially debated, especially with regard of ecological and social costs.

After a historical embedding of the topic, the media analysis is conducted through a choice of magazines and newspapers in a time period from 2000 until 2016. Furthermore, the dissertation incorporates a chapter based on field work in the Polavaram Dam area in order to shed light on perspectives often marginalised in the media discourses: those of the affected communities. The dissertation reveals the continuum of developmental imaginations in the discourses on India's large scale infrastructure projects until today, points out how power hierarchies are at work with regard to who is able to participate in the discourses and who is not, and highlights narratives closely linked to ideas of nation- or statebuilding that are used by politicians within the media discourses.



### **Zusammenfassung**

Im Jahre 1954 verkündete Indiens erster Premierminister Jawaharlal Nehru, dass Staudämme die „Tempel des modernen Indiens“ seien. Ausgehend von der These, dass dieser Aussage einer „developmental imagination“ zugrunde liegt, die bis heute ein auffälliges Merkmal vieler Diskurse zu Großprojekten in Indien ist, und dass die Medien eine wichtige Rolle darin spielen, diese Diskurse zu zeichnen, betrachtet die Dissertation die Frage, wie große Wasserinfrastrukturprojekte in der indischen Medienlandschaft dargestellt werden. Um diese Frage zu beantworten, wird in der Dissertation eine Medienanalyse durchgeführt, bei welcher die Berichterstattung zum Indischen River Linking Projekt (NRLP) und zu zwei Vorhaben, die im Rahmen des NRLP stattfinden (Ken-Betwa und Polavaram), im Fokus stehen.

Das 168-Milliarden Dollar teure NRLP Projekt ist das weltweit größte sich im Bau befindliche Wasserprojekt und sieht den Bau vieler Staudämme und Verbindungskanäle vor. Für die Erschaffung des gigantischen Wassernetzwerkes soll die Mehrzahl der indischen Flüsse miteinander verbunden werden. Kontrovers debattiert wird das NRLP insbesondere in Bezug auf die hohen ökologischen und sozialen Kosten.

Nach einer historischen Einbettung des Themas wird die Medienanalyse anhand einer Auswahl an Zeitungs- und Zeitschriftenartikeln aus dem Zeitraum 2000 bis 2016 durchgeführt. Darüber hinaus beinhaltet die Arbeit ein Kapitel, welches sich auf Feldforschung im Polavaram Staudammgebiet bezieht, um Perspektiven, die ansonsten in Mediendiskursen häufig marginalisiert werden, aufzuzeigen; die der von Umsiedelung betroffenen Communities. Die Dissertation zeigt das Kontinuum der „developmental imaginations“ in Indiens Diskursen zu großen Infrastrukturprojekten auf, weist auf die Machthierarchien hin, die ausschlaggebend dafür sind, wem die Möglichkeit zukommt sich überhaupt an Diskursen zu beteiligen, und hebt politische Narrative hervor, die in dem Kontext eine starke Verbindung zu „Nationbuilding“ oder „Statebuilding“ Diskursen aufweisen.

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## List of Abbreviations

1/70 Act	Land Transfer Regulation Act in Andhra Pradesh in 1970
AIKMS	Indian Peasant Union "All-India Kisan Mazdoor Sabha"
ARS	Adivasi Rakshana Samithi
BJD	Biju Janata Dal
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CBIP	Central Board of Irrigation and Power
CBO	Community Based Organisations
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CM	Chief Minister
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
DPR	Detailed Project Report
EPW	Economic and Political Weekly
GWDT	Godavari Water Disputes Tribunal
IIT	Indian Institute of Technology
ILR	Interlinking of Rivers
IWMI	International Water Management Institute
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MoEF	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
MoWR	Ministry of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation
MP	Member of Parliament
MP	Madhya Pradesh
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPP	National Perspective Plan
NRI	Non-resident Indians
NRLP	National River Link Project
NWDA	National Water Development Agency
PAP	Project-Affected People
PESA	Provisions of the Panchayat (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act
R&R / RR	Rehabilitation & Resettlement

SANDRP	South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People
UP	Uttar Pradesh
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
YSR	Yuvajana, Shramika, Rythu Congress Party

### **Indian Numbering System**

1 lakh =	100,000 or 1,00,000 in the Indian system
1 crore =	10,000,000 or 1,00,00,000 in the Indian system

## **Introduction**

### **Developing the Nation: India and its Large Scale Water Infrastructure Projects**

Communities protesting, often with women at the forefront, standing in water rising up to the neck, raising their fists in their fight against displacement by India's dam projects: it was these images that were covered in the media around the world in the 1990s and 2000s. At that time the Sardar Sarivar Project at the Narmada river brought large scale dam infrastructure and their social consequences into the spotlights. The extend to which India constructed and continues to construct dams is massive: In 2016 more than 4,900 large dams<sup>1</sup> could be found in India – 4,600 of which were built after national independence in 1947, and 300 more were still under construction (cf. Central Water Commission 2016). Though protest and protesters as well as prominent activists, received large international attention at the time, no change in politics seems to have resulted from it: not only was the Sardar Sarivar Project ceremonially inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in September 2017, but also other large dams continue to be planned and built all across the country.

As visible from the protest, the debates on the construction of dams are often intertwined with the question of the expropriation of citizens. Estimates on the magnitude of displacement caused by large scale infrastructure projects in India since independence vary considerably, with figures ranging between 21 to 65 million people (cf. Ray 2000; Stewart and Rukmini Rao 2006; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre and Norwegian Refugee Council 2016). Given

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<sup>1</sup> A large dam is defined as a dam with a height of more than 15 meters. Currently more than 40,000 large dams exist worldwide (International Rivers 2012).



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the scale of this displacement, it can be asked what benefits are intended to be achieved through these projects, for whom and with which consequences? Exclusionary discourses and practices seem to arise, with those already marginalised suffering the most and benefiting the least from the projects. Yet, dam building continues to be framed as "development".

In India, it is especially Adivasi communities that are affected by so called development-induced displacement.<sup>2</sup> While only accounting for 8.6% of the Indian population, research suggests that at least 40% of the people affected by displacement from infrastructural development projects in India are members of these indigenous communities (cf. Fernandes 2007). As marginalised groups, their possibilities to resist are often limited, although examples of resistance do exist, as illustrated by the Naxalite movement.<sup>3</sup> Research also points to successes of previous anti-dam movements, which also often included Adivasi communities. Chowdhury for example argues for the case of Maharashtra that it was rationalisation of demands "through a legal right-based claim-making approach" (Roy Chowdhury 2018, 2) in the 1960s and 1970s that led to successful transformations within the state in favour of dam oustees. It is pointed out that

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2 'Adivasi' is an umbrella term for India's very diverse indigenous communities. I will be using the term in the dissertation, although I am aware of its limitations in describing very heterogeneous groups with heterogeneous experiences. The constitution of India lists more than 700 different so called 'Scheduled Tribes' which according to the Census of 2011 make up 8.6% of the total population (cf. Government of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs 2011).

3 The Naxalite movement's name originates from the village of Naxalbari in the Indian state of Westbengal, where in 1967 members of local Adivasi communities started an armed struggle against landlords aiming at a redistribution of land. It draws on Maoist ideology and continues to be present in East and South-Eastern parts of India until today, though the government fought an extensive battle against Naxalite groups especially in the 2000s, leading to the death of thousands. For more information cf. Prakash Singh 2016.

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“the dam evictee’s movement in Maharashtra [...] achieved significant success against a paternalistic and developmentalist state in the 1970s” and that the oustees at the time “were successful in challenging the hegemonic and developmentalist ideology of the INC [Indian National Congress] government” (Roy Chowdhury 2018, 16 f.).

Yet though the Maharashtra movement in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in the Maharashtra Resettlement of Project Displaces Persons (MRPDP) Act in 1976, which was the first law in India with regard to the resettlement and rehabilitation of project affected people, and which informed many of the laws on the topic that followed, insufficient or non-existing resettlement plans continue to be common features in the displacement process of many dam projects, both in India and across the global context.<sup>4</sup> Examples such as the Belo Monte dam in Brazil, have been at the centre of global media attention and have been criticised for the social and environmental impacts (cf. International Rivers 2012). Yet despite the critique, large scale dam projects continue to be implemented worldwide and are often supported by international development organizations such as the World Bank.

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<sup>4</sup> See for example Vandergeest, Bose, and Idahosa 2007 for a variety of cases of displacements induced by 'development' sharing those features (for example projects in Sudan, Malaysia, Eastern Thailand, Colombia, Costa Rica, Honduras).



*Figure 1: Protest against the Sardar Sarovar Project (cf. National Alliance of People's Movements 2015).*

Historically, the idea of dam building in India is closely linked to concepts of development and to nation-building efforts. It is especially former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru who is often seen as the main actor in the implementation of projects inspired by developmental ideologies since independence. As Klingensmith points out: "Engineering was a way of imagining and conducting the nationalist struggle on a new front" (Klingensmith 2007, 252). Not only development was meant to be achieved, but a nation united through a developmental imagination, a transformation of the whole Indian society from a "traditional" to a "modern" society.

Historian Zachariah also points to the relationship between the Nehruvian developmental imagination and nationalism. Distinguishing the developmental imagination from developmentalism, Zachariah sees:

The latter associated with states, state-building, and statist projects, the former a more diffuse set of hegemonic assumptions (in the Gramscian sense) shared among state and non-state actors [...]. The two are connected, but distinct: it is often the developmental imagination that enables the process of legitimation of developmentalism. A statist project of developmentalism, by contrast, contains constituent elements that must be hidden, underplayed, or disavowed lest they come into conflict with the developmental imagination (Zachariah 2005, x f.).

After India's independence in 1947, the project of nation-building through state-led developmentalism was seen as preferable, even progressive, in comparison to "a dangerous, potentially or actually exclusionary 'cultural nationalism'" (Zachariah 2011, 208). Within the developmentalist project "a commitment to the nation-state is underpinned by the fact that 'development' takes place within the claimed geographical boundaries of that state" (Zachariah 2011, 209). Though at first sight a nationalism built on the idea of developmentalism seems less exclusionary, Zachariah remarks:

Very early on in the life of the new Indian state [...] it became clear that in its operation, the developmental imagination excluded the representatives of non-elite groups from making decisions pertaining to the 'nation'. Exclusion based on a common commitment to a developmental project claiming to be for their benefit, in a paternalistic appropriation on the part of an allegedly benign state and its government, was, in being 'developmental', also largely non-'cultural'; to what extent such exclusions, based on class, and therefore not 'national' exclusions, were less exclusionary than those

potentially based on 'culture' remains open to question (Zachariah 2011, 240).

The imaginary of bringing development to the country through technological advancement, and the exclusion of large parts of society from the discourse on what kind of development is necessary or desirable, continues to endure in contemporary India. Current Prime Minister Modi is a strong advocate of technological solutions as a means to achieve 'progress and prosperity' (Borah 2015).<sup>5</sup> And Modi is not alone: global debates on meeting the Sustainable Development Goals or combatting climate change are dominated to a large extent by techno-managerial planning approaches as opposed to democratic debates. As Luhmann argues, one feature of modern society is that technology is often used to reduce complexity and that in modern societies human deficiency and ecological problems are increasingly seen as financial problems for which technical solutions need to be found (Luhmann 1992). In the same line, Bandyopadhyay argues that 'development' in the global South is more and more defined by economic growth rather than by "inclusion, human dignity and ecological stability" (Bandyopadhyay 2017, 35). He further remarks:

In the present era, human societies are quickly nearing that critical civilisational crossroad where a vigorous discussion is needed on the forms of desirable human futures in the era of rapid and potent advancements in frontier science knowledge and modern technologies. If human societies do not consciously address that tasks, it will be taken up in proxy by the techno-scientific drivers in the global market [...]. In such a case, a pre-fabricated human future, designed by

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5 Citing Modi from a speech on large scale dam projects in Arunchal Pradesh.

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quantifiable indicators like the GDP, will replace conscious human choices. The crucial qualitative aspects, on which human dignity and civilisations or ecological stability of the natural environment are based, run the risk of being marginalised in that process (Bandyopadhyay 2017, 36).

The described phenomenon is very visible in political discourses in India. The large discrepancy between international and national protest and criticism of large scale water infrastructure projects and its yet continuous prominence in state-led "development" activities, can leave us wondering, how the government is able to ignore the critique and continue "business as usual"? Based on the assumption that media plays a very important role in shaping the public discourses and also in transporting the narratives used by politicians in legitimizing such projects vis-à-vis the country's citizens, the following dissertation will look at currently debated dam projects in India through the lens of a media analysis in order to get a better understanding on how this discrepancy manifests itself within this framework. Based on the thesis that *the developmental imagination continues to be prominent in the discourse on dam projects in India until today*, the dissertation will consider the following research question:

*How are large scale water infrastructure schemes covered in the Indian media?*

Subquestion to that are:

- *What strands of discourses can be identified in the media analysis?*
- *How do they relate to the discourse on development through technological advancement?*
- *How are the arguments presented?*
- *Which narratives and imaginaries are being touched upon?*

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- *Which role do the politicians play in the media coverage? How do they use the media analysed to spread their narratives on large scale water infrastructure projects?*
- *Who gets a chance to speak within the media coverage at all? With what content? Who's perspectives are covered? Who's are not?*
- *Which positions do journalists take?*
- *How does the media coverage relate to the experiences of those affected by displacement? And in how far do the perspectives portrayed in the media differ from the realities on the ground?*

In order to answer the questions raised above, a case study was chosen to serve as an example of a large scale water infrastructure scheme. The Indian National River Link Project (NRLP) was selected as a suitable object of study, as the 168-billion-dollar project includes the construction of several dams and is designed to connect the majority of Indian rivers to a large water grid. It is the world's largest water project in the making. The network of rivers is supposed to be capable of reducing water shortages in drought prone areas and to serve water to industry and the general population. The general understanding is that, as the floods mostly take place in the North whereas the South is a highly drought prone area, it should be possible to shift the water from one place to the other thereby solving both problems at once.

Historically, the first media reports on the project date back to 1878 when *The Times of India*, a major English-speaking newspaper publication in India, first reported on British irrigation engineer Sir Arthur Cotton's idea of creating a national water grid (cf. *The Times of India* 1878). He recommended the linking of rivers as a means of transport as an alternative to railways. A canal system should be established which would enable navigation. In the following decades until 1913, several further articles published in *The Times of India* point to canal

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linking plans as a matter of railway versus canals as means of transportation (cf. Macdonnell 1899). Reporting paused after 1913 and the idea only came back after India's independence under Nehru's rule in the 1950s, when the period of large scale infrastructure projects started. At that time the main reasons given for implementing the project were still navigation and transport opportunities. In 1956 a "master plan for developing inland waterways in the country in order to provide adequate cheap transport in a developing economy" (The Times of India 1956) was presented by the Central Water Commission of the Government of India and reported upon on the front page of *The Times of India*. Part of this plan was the possibility of creating a west-east connection and thereby linking Kolkata in West-Bengal to Kochi in Kerala. The idea however disappeared again for some years, until Union Minister of Irrigation and Power K. L. Rao pushed forward with the plan of a national water grid in the 1970s. A component of his proposal was the 2600 km long Ganga-Cauvery link, which is also included in the current NRLP plans. From the 1970s on, the narratives of the benefits of river interlinking were no longer focusing on enabling transport on the rivers, but rather on solving drought and flood problems as well as food shortages, providing irrigation facilities and ensuring domestic water supply (cf. The Times of India 1972a, 1972b).

In 1982 the government of India set up the National Water Development Agency (NWDA) with the task of carrying out pre-feasibility studies (cf. The Times of India 1981b; Stewart and Rukmini Rao 2006). Other proposed benefits such as hydro-electricity entered the scene (cf. The Times of India 1981a). The heavy political focus on using technology to achieve development remained. Today's plan of making the NRLP become reality is closely linked to Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee (in office 1998-2004), who made the advancement of the project essential to his politics and was strongly advocating it. In line with Vajpayee, the then president of India Abdul Kalam



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mentioned the NRLP as a project of major importance in his Independence Day speech of 2002 (cf. Parul 2003).

Under the circumstances of India's current water crisis and the worst droughts in decades, the call for the grand project has become loud again (cf. Vira 2016). With another BJP government in place, implementation has started and the project is advancing with high speed. However, lots of unsolved issues remain, especially with regard to inter-state disputes. The current National Perspective Plan (NPP) developed by the NWDA envisages two parts of the project: one northern Himalayan and one southern Peninsular river development component; whereby the former includes 14 river links and the later 16 (cf. Figure 2, Figure 3). Through these links 37 Himalayan and Peninsular rivers will be connected and 3000 water storages will be built (cf. U. Amarasinghe 2012). After the first link was completed with the opening of the canal between Godavari and Krishna River in Andhra Pradesh in 2015, the corresponding dam project is yet still under construction, the next project in the line is the Ken-Betwa link, linking the Ken in Madhya Pradesh to the Betwa in Uttar Pradesh.

## PROPOSED INTER BASIN WATER TRANSFER LINKS HIMALAYAN COMPONENT

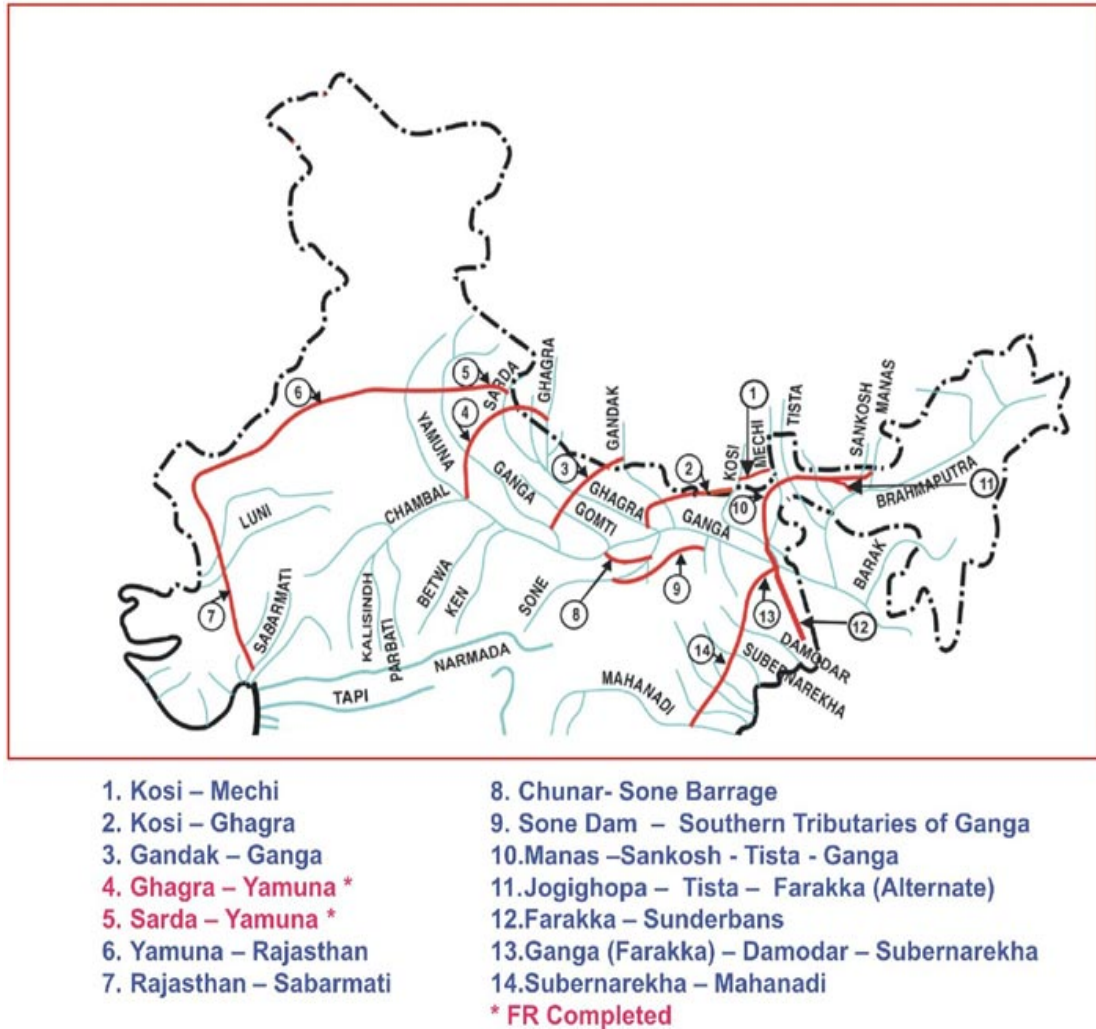
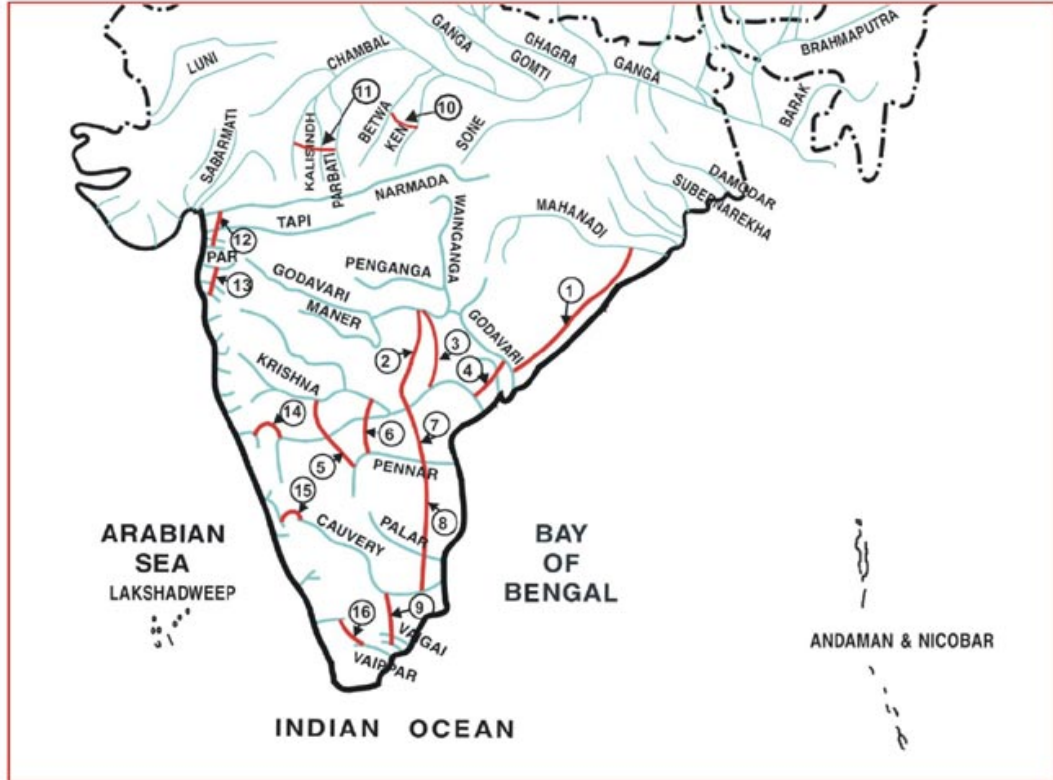


Figure 2: NRLP Scheme, Himalayan Component (National Water Development Agency 2016b).

## PROPOSED INTER BASIN WATER TRANSFER LINKS PENINSULAR COMPONENT



- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Mahanadi (Manibhadra) – Godavari (Dowlaiswaram) *   | 9. Cauvery (Kattalai) – Vaigai – Gundar * |
| 2. Godavari (Inchampalli) – Krishna (Nagarjunasagar) * | 10. Ken – Betwa *                         |
| 3. Godavari (Inchampalli) – Krishna (Pulichintala) *   | 11. Parbati – Kalisindh – Chambal *       |
| 4. Godavari (Polavaram) – Krishna (Vijayawada) *       | 12. Par – Tapi – Narmada *                |
| 5. Krishna (Almatti) – Pennar *                        | 13. Damanganga – Pinjal *                 |
| 6. Krishna (Srisailem) – Pennar *                      | 14. Bedti – Varda                         |
| 7. Krishna (Nagarjunasagar) – Pennar (Somasila) *      | 15. Netravati – Hemavati                  |
| 8. Pennar (Somasila) – Palar- Cauvery (Grand Anicut) * | 16. Pamba – Achankovil – Vaippar *        |
|  | * FR Completed                            |

Figure 3: NRLP Scheme, Peninsular Component (National Water Development Agency 2016c).

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The benefits created through the implementation of the NPP, as stated by the NWDA, include among other things the creation of new irrigation facilities, the generation of hydro-power, drought mitigation, flood control, water supply for domestic and industrial purposes, navigation facilities, employment opportunities through the construction of the projects, pollution control as well as infrastructural and socio-economic development (cf. National Water Development Agency 2016a). Yet despite its advertised benefits, the NRLP has been heavily criticised for its economic, social and ecological costs by researchers from both social and natural sciences perspectives, activists and journalists (cf. Alley 2008; T. H. Rao 2005, 2012; Rajlakshmi 2012; Maheshwari 2007b, 2007a; Vira 2016). The ecological consequences pointed to, refer for example to the vast areas of forest land that will be submerged, including national parks and wild life reservoirs. The social costs of the project include about 5.5 million people that will be displaced with insufficient resettlement plans at hand (cf. Swain 2015). Typically for development-induced displacement in India, it is mainly Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste communities which will be affected. Those benefiting are mostly not those who will suffer from its construction, as already pointed out in the beginning of this introduction.

Critics further highlight the immense amounts of energy needed in order to pump water through canals – revoking the alleged gain of energy through hydro-power. Referring to D. Raghunandan, associate of the All India People's Science Network and the Delhi Science forum, journalist Rajlakshmi in *Frontline*, an Indian English language fortnightly magazine, for example points out that the shifting of water goes "against gravity and requires huge amounts of energy. The northern rivers will have to be lifted high above the Vindhyas in order to reach the southern States" (Rajlakshmi 2012). Further criticism has also arisen with regards to water sharing arrangements between neighbouring Indian states affected by the scheme. In India's federal system, water is a state concern and therefore permission from

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the states in question is required in order to pursue the implementation of the project. Environmental activist Himanshu Thakkar summarizes these many-faceted concerns with the words: "ILR [Interlinking of Rivers] is costly, environmentally destructive, socially disruptive and a non-optimum option, particularly in view of the changing climate" (Phadnis 2016).

While critics of the NRLP scheme have advocated in favour of smaller projects which achieve similar or better results with minimal social cost, the current Modi government is strongly in favour of the project and has pushed ahead with its implementation. The project is also supported by the Supreme Court which in a judgement of 2012 ruled:

We not only express a pious hope of speedy implementation but also do hereby issue a mandamus to the Central and the State Governments concerned to comply with the directions contained in this judgement effectively and expeditiously and without default. This is a matter of national benefit and progress. We see no reason why any State should lag behind in contributing its bit to bring the Inter-linking River Program to a success, thus saving the people living in drought-prone zones from hunger and people living in flood-prone areas from the destruction caused by floods (Supreme Court of India 2012, 62).

The national importance of the project is further emphasized in the judgement by the following words:

We have no hesitation in observing that the national interest must take precedence over the interest of the individual States. The State Governments are expected to view national problems with a greater objectivity, rationality and spirit of service to the nation and ill-

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founded objections may result in greater harm, not only to the neighbouring States but also to the nation at large (Supreme Court of India 2012, 47).

As rendered visible by these statements, the underlying assumption is that the NRLP will benefit the development of the nation – a discourse that is also reflected within the Indian newspaper landscape. Though television and the internet, also on smartphones, are highly important information sources for a large share of the Indian population and their influence continuously grows, newspapers continue to be a very dominant media in India. As Schneider points out, "India is presently one of the largest markets for English-language newspapers and magazines in the world" (N.-C. Schneider 2013, 1), and *The Times of India* is the newspaper with the largest circulation of any English language newspaper in the world (cf. N.-C. Schneider 2013). The total number of registered newspapers in India adds up to more than 82,000, reaching a number of circulation of more than 329 million. Newspapers therefore are one of the main media active in shaping as well as reflecting the political as well as the civic discourse on large scale water infrastructural schemes in the Indian context.

To find answers to the questions posed above, the dissertation will conduct a media analysis on the NRLP in general and two specific projects, the Polavaram and the Ken-Betwa Project both implemented under the NRLP scheme, through a choice of magazines and newspapers in a time period from 2000 until 2016, from a perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The time period was chosen as it reflects the latest phase of the NRLP idea popping up, a phase that continues until today. It can provide us with insides on how the discourses function and how large scale water infrastructure projects are debated. Yet, its historical trajectories should be kept in mind, which is why preceding the media analysis an introduction to the developmental imagination in state-building efforts will be

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given through the lens of speeches by Indian prime ministers, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the historical roots of the phenomenon.

To address the questions of who gets a chance to speak and who does not and in how far the portrayal of social consequences as portrayed in the media matches the experiences on the ground, the third chapter of this dissertation provides insights relying on fieldwork that was conducted in the Polavaram Project area and interviews that took place with those affected by displacement as well as activists on the ground. The dissertation therefore works with a threefold structure: the first chapter aiming at the understanding the historical trajectories, the second chapter, being the main chapter, serving to conducting the analysis of the media discourses on the NRLP, the Polavaram Project and the Ken-Betwa Project, and the third chapter, again shorter, providing insights into the situation in project affected areas. In the conclusion the results of these three chapters will than be brought together. Yet before moving towards the first chapter, the following part will shortly provide more details on the state of research on the topic as well as on the data used and methods employed in the dissertation.

## State of Research

This chapter considers the major contribution to the field of the study of 1) large dams in general, 2) the NRLP more specifically and 3) the Ken-Betwa and the Polavaram Project in particular, before pointing out the relevance of this dissertation in light of the state of research.

In 2000 the World Commission on Dams (WCD), an independent commission co-financed by the World Bank and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), with the “mandate [...] to review the development effectiveness of dams, and to develop standards and guidelines for future dams” (International

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Rivers 2008) published a comprehensive report which triggered a wide interest in research on large dam building. The report highlights the social and environmental costs of large dam construction, and concludes that: "The rights-and-risks approach we propose will raise the importance of social and environmental dimensions of dams to a level once reserved for the economic dimension" (World Commission on Dams 2000, 320). It was especially after its release that the study of large dams has caught the interest of several social science researchers. Publications to be mentioned in this field are for example McCully's "Silenced rivers: the ecology and politics of large dams" from 2001, D'Souza's "Drowned and dammed: colonial capitalism, and flood control in eastern India" from 2006, Klingensmith's "One Valley and a Thousand: Dams, Nationalism, and Development" from 2007 and Nüsser's "Large Dams in Asia – Contested Environments between Technological Hydroscares and Social Resistance" from 2014 (cf. McCully 2001; D'Souza 2006; Klingensmith 2007; Nüsser 2014a; see also: Baghel 2014; Werner 2015).<sup>6</sup> These publications are united by the assumption that "large dams are not merely material artefacts of gigantic engineering and infrastructure projects, or central components in the transformation of fluvial environments and energy generation, but they are also expressions of prevailing development paradigms" (Nüsser 2014b, 6). It is in accordance with this assumption that this dissertation will approach the topic of large scale dam building in India.

Though this interest in large dams by international researchers did appear, the NRLP, as the world's largest water project in the making, has not been studied to a great extend. One of the few exceptions is made by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), a non-profit research institute founded by the Ford

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<sup>6</sup> An overview of the large dam debates is provided in Nüsser 2014a.



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Foundation and supported by the World Bank, based in Colombo, Sri Lanka, which has published a series of papers providing analyses of the project's technical feasibility and its costs and benefits relation (U. A. Amarasinghe et al. 2008; U. Amarasinghe and Sharma 2008; Saleth 2009; M. D. Kumar and Amarasinghe 2009; International Water Management Institute 2009). The IWMI does take a critical stance towards the project and points out that though "the donor basins may have surplus water to make the NRLP technically feasible [...] there is need for nuanced analysis of whether, as the best possible option available for India, it is justifiable" (U. Amarasinghe 2012). Amarasinghe and Srinivasulu, undertaking a cost-benefit analysis of the projects under the NRLP scheme, conclude that:

"[the] analysis indicates that if new water transfers only bring new lands into cultivation, the benefits are immense. Also, if water transfers are only used for irrigating the existing rainfed lands, the net value-added benefits could still exceed costs by several factors. However, in reality this is not the case (U. A. Amarasinghe and Srinivasulu 2009, 47)"

They argue that though the project sounds promising at first sight, there are many areas that are supposed to be brought under irrigation that are already irrigated thereby shedding a very different light on the data used by the government to advertise the NRLP. Furthermore they point out that there are "environmental factors due to area submergence and loss of river flows, and social factors due to displacement, resettlement and rehabilitation of project-affected people" (U. A. Amarasinghe and Srinivasulu 2009, 47) that are not considered in the government's analysis but that have to be taken into account in order to conduct a useful financial and social benefit-cost analysis.

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Reviewing the previous studies conducted by the IWMI, Shah and Amarasinghe published a further paper in 2016 with mixed conclusions (cf. T. Shah and Amarasinghe 2016). They point out that “the project is so large that it is difficult to conduct a holistic analysis leading to a social cost and benefits. The main reason for this is due to little information and data available in the public domain” (T. Shah and Amarasinghe 2016, 125). The main finding of the paper is that many of the assumptions on which the NRLP is based date back to the 1990s and are likely to have undergone quite some change in the last decades and will further be subject to change before the individual projects might undergo the feasibility analyses. This perception however does not lead to a rigorous opposition to the project, it is rather that the researchers point out that these changes could even be “favorable for a comprehensive solution of the kind of NRLP, although it is likely to be quite different in nature to the presently conceived form” (T. Shah and Amarasinghe 2016, 125–26).

Shah and Amarasinghe point out seven aspects that they deem relevant in regard to how water infrastructure development will take place in India in the following years and point out that these future aspects need to be taken into account by the political leaders if the project was to become “economic enterprises justified by cold calculus of benefits and costs” rather than only “political statements by ambitious rulers rather” as often seen throughout India’s history (T. Shah and Amarasinghe 2016, 126). These aspects include 1) the improvement of India’s economic situation which might make more financial resources available to spend on water infrastructure, 2) a large demand from the economy to improve the management and implementation of infrastructure development which “will also restore public confidence in the water bureaucracies’ capacity to deliver on their promises, and ease the prevailing opposition to ‘sterile gigantisms’” (T. Shah and Amarasinghe 2016, 126), 3) again an economy-driven push for an improvement in resettlement and rehabilitation measures thereby “alleviating the other major

concerns of civil society about large water projects” (T. Shah and Amarasinghe 2016, 126), 4) the rise in incomes that will result in a demand for better water services that citizens will be willing to pay for. This process will in turn lead to an improvement in the visibility of financial aspects of water infrastructure which in turn increases the role of price negotiations in water conflicts as opposed to political negotiations. Aspect 5) relates to the diversification of agriculture which is foreseen to create a larger demand for irrigation services that again farmers will also be willing to pay for, whereas aspect 6) foresees that a rise in energy costs will create a shift from pump irrigation towards surface water demand. The last point 7) then points out that the growth of urban areas will continue to affect the groundwater in such way that inter-basin transfer for urban needs will become necessary. The two authors conclude that “India may or may not implement NRLP as proposed. However, there seems no avoiding massive water infrastructure investments on a scale similar or even exceeding the NRLP” (T. Shah and Amarasinghe 2016, 126).

The points that Shah and Amarasinghe take up in their paper touch upon aspects that this dissertation will address within the media analysis. To anticipate: many critics raising their voice within the analysed data are to a great extent less optimistic in their outlook into the future than the two researches and are especially sceptic with regard to the water bureaucrats (in)abilities of delivering promised results and of the way resettlement and rehabilitation is conducted.

Next to the comprehensive literature on the NRLP published by the IWMI, the *Economic and Political Weekly* (EPW), an Indian peer reviewed academic journal, is a medium where critical debates surrounding the NRLP and especially its social and ecological consequences take place (cf. Iyer 2012, 2014; D. K. Mishra 2012; N. Islam 2006). These publications provide information regarding the status of the scheme's implementation, and question its technical feasibility and use, whilst

highlighting its impact and consequences. They mostly take a rather critical stance towards the project.

The edited volume "Interlinking of Rivers in India: Issues and Concerns" by Mirza, Ahmed and Ahmad (cf. Mirza, Ahmed, and Ahmad 2008) is the only collected volume dedicated specifically to the issue of the NRLP. It includes for example papers on the project's impact of climate change, public health, energy availability or on relations to neighbouring countries affected by it (cf. Lal 2008; Knowlton et al. 2008; Brichieri-Colombi 2008b, 2008a; M. R. Islam and Ahlam 2008; Dhungel and Pun 2008). As it is the case with the IWMI research, many of the papers included in this anthology call for a more thorough examination of the NRLP's presuppositions before moving towards an implementation (cf. i.e. Banyopadhyay and Shama 2008, 73). The book also features an article on the Ken-Betwa Project, one of the first two projects to be implemented. The authors' view on the project is a sceptical one, concluding that their "study raised serious concerns about the suitability of the proposed KBLP [Ken-Betwa Link Project] as a water management strategy for the Ken and Betwa region in India" (Krueger, Segovia, and Toubia 2008, 184).

A critique of the Ken-Betwa Project is also offered in the anthology *Interlinking of Rivers in India – Overview and Ken-Betwa Link*, which was published in 2006 and includes chapters written by famous NRLP proponents such as Himanshu Thakkar and activist Medha Patkar who question it from several angles including its social and environmental costs (cf. Alagh et al. 2006). Patkar also edited a very small publication published by the National Alliance of People's Movement in 2004 with articles by activists speaking out against the project (cf. Patkar 2004).

The already mentioned IWMI, also published a paper specifically on the Ken-Betwa Link concluding that "the benefit-cost ratio of the irrigation component

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seems to be very small even under the most optimistic scenarios" (U. A. Amarasinghe et al. 2008, 213). Concerns regarding the project are also raised by Gopal and Marothia in a 2016 *EPW* article, in which they illustrate their environmental concerns regarding the Ken-Betwa Project whilst arguing for alternative systems such as traditional water harvesting structures. The article points out: "Mega projects with large reservoirs that take decades to plan, design, and implement are very expensive, and cause ecological and social disruption, which do not mitigate the problems of today or tomorrow" (Gopal and Marothia 2016, 23).

On the case of the Polavaram Dam, the one NRLP project already under construction, even less studies have been conducted. An exception is a publication from 1994, in which Hyderabad based sociologists Bushan and Murali provide a study on the communities affected by displacement in the Polavaram area, including detailed accounts on the project's effect on each of the communities (cf. Bhushan and Murali 1994). It is an important document, as it is the only comprehensive study I have come across that looks at the situation of the local communities in great detail and studies the specificities of the areas affected by the project.

Also Mariotti, a scholar from SOAS University in London, in her PhD project in Economics conducted fieldwork in the area of the Polavaram Project to analyse possible flaws in the resettlement policies and to provide policy recommendations for more successful rehabilitation programmes in the area (cf. Mariotti 2012). She concludes that there are three mechanisms, "participation in decision making, creation of secure and remunerative employment, and periodical cash transfers", that would "contribute to link resettlement programmes to the broader aims of poverty reduction and equitable distribution, thus turning resettlement into a progressive process" (Mariotti 2012, 307).

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Further sources on the Polavaram project include an article in *EPW*, in which the author presents a comprehensive critique to the Polavaram Project (P. T. Rao 2006). Another publication addressing the project on a side-note is Umamaheswari's publication "When Godavari Comes – People's history of a river – Journeys in the Zone of the Dispossessed" (Umamaheshwari 2014). It is however rather of a published travel journal with her reflections upon the issue of displacement rather than a scientific contribution to the field. Apart from these mentioned publications, there is no substantial research on the NRLP and the projects proposed under this scheme.

Several of the discussed publications draw a connection between dams building in India and political agendas of nationalism and development (cf. i.e. Klingensmith 2007) often including a historical perspective on especially Nehru's role in this undertaking. Yet little research is done on how these projects are being debated and discursively framed within the Indian context in a broader perspective and especially in the recent years. How are the political agendas "sold" to the population today, i.e. how the legitimization of such large scale water infrastructure is made accessible to the citizens of the country and what strategies are employed in this undertaking? What strands of discourses can be identified in the public debates of the projects? This gap in knowledge will be addressed by the dissertation by the means of a media analysis.

## **Data, Methods and Theoretical Framing**

As argued in the introduction, newspapers continue to be one of the most prominent media widely used in the Indian context. As their role in shaping media discourses can be considered highly significant, it is this medium that was chosen for the conduction of the media analysis within the dissertation. Working with Indian newspaper publications, language is an issue that must be considered. As

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Schneider points out, a strong division between English language press and non-English language press is made in the Indian context. She points to the historic context of this division, which she identifies within colonial times. According to this account, in post-independence India:

the central government's assumption [was] that the non-English-language press was 'less national' and 'less modern' and exhibited more 'communalist tendencies' than the English-language press – an attitude remarkably similar to the stance the British colonial administration had taken vis-à-vis the so-called "vernacular" press (N.-C. Schneider 2013, 6).

Concerning the British attitude she further explains that "the British's mistrust in the Indian non-English language press was closely linked to the colonizer's difficulty to access these languages, the 'vernacular' press therefore being "potentially 'seditious'" (N.-C. Schneider 2013, 12). Until today, "the English-language and the regional-language press are seen as representatives of two diametrically opposed and monolithic interest groups of two distinct public spheres and audiences" (N.-C. Schneider 2013, 13), Schneider further highlights. Whereas "national" interests are supposed to be reflected in English-language newspapers, and are seen as "rational, liberal and legitimate", other Indian-language newspapers are considered to be regional newspapers serving "narrow communal and ethnic loyalties" (N.-C. Schneider 2013, 13).

Schneider calls for a questioning of this framing. Though pointing out that regional language press might indeed influence communal conflicts, such as the controversial role of the Gujarati press in the anti-Muslim riots in 2002, she also highlights examples, where this point of view is challenged. Among the examples given are big newspaper houses such as *The Times of India* that are increasingly

publishing their editions also in regional languages without necessarily adapting to the local context but rather by translating the national news previously only published in English language. Schneider also points to *Mathrubhumi* newspaper which refers to itself as "The national daily in Malayalam". She therefore asks: "Why should the idea of belonging simultaneously to a national as well as a regional community be considered as mutually exclusive?" (N.-C. Schneider 2013, 15).

Though keeping the construction of a binary opposition of English language versus non-English language newspapers in mind, the choice for this dissertation was made to consider only English-language press. As the NRLP scheme is nation-wide, this was a deliberate choice in order to select sources that appeal to a wider Indian audience across different state and language barriers, which is usually not the case for i.e. publications in local languages such as Gujarati, Telugu or Malayalam. Though insights into other language discourses could bring further interesting results, the incorporation of different Indian language media would extend the scope of the dissertation project and would not be feasible within its framework. The dissertation therefore does not seek to analyse the discourses as they might or might not differ in different regions of the country, but aims at providing an insight into the debates within the English-language newspaper landscape. It would however be an interesting starting point for further research to also address non-English press discourses and their possible differences.

Therefore, to trace the discourse on the NRLP in Indian newspapers, articles by the leading Indian nationwide newspapers and magazines were collected on the NRLP. As dailies the three English speaking Indian newspapers with the largest readership were chosen: *The Times of India* with 7.6 million readers in 2014, *Hindustan Times* with 4.5 million readers and *The Hindu* with an outreach of 1.6



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million readers (cf. Media Research Users Council 2014). The newspapers are supplemented with two fortnightly magazines: *India Today*, the English language magazine in India with the largest readership (1.6 million), and *Down to Earth*, which differs significantly from the other mentioned media. The magazine focuses on environment issues and has a rather small circulation. However it is widely recognized for its work in this specific thematic area. A publication that was excluded from the data is the *EPW*, a major social science journal in India publishing research also on issues such as the NRLP. It was excluded as it portrays academic debates, whereas the analysis' focus will be on media debates.

Next to the analysis of the debate focusing on the NRLP in general, two further cases were included to have comparable results between debates taking place on the larger scheme and on regional projects in the planning or implementation phase. The variation aims at responding to the following questions: *Are there different foci when reporting on specific projects rather than the large scheme? In how far do the narratives differ?* The first case is the Ken-Betwa Project serving as an example of a project in the planning stage – at least at the point of writing this dissertation. The project is designed as a component of the NRLP linking Ken and Betwa rivers in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh and has been highly debated in the press. Ken-Betwa is the project next in line after the Polavaram Project, which is already under implementation and will serve as the second example for the analysis of a project under the NRLP scheme. The table below indicates the numbers of articles collected in the corresponding years, combining the articles on the general NRLP debate, the Ken-Betwa Project and the Polavaram Project. Altogether, 478 articles were collected.

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	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Hindustan Times	0	2	3	4	7	7	3	4	11	6	2	0	12	17	11	89
Down to Earth	1	3	7	4	1	0	1	0	0	2	3	2	4	5	6	39
India Today	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	3	0	5	0	7	20	50	88
Times of India	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	18	15	46	87
The Hindu	0	3	2	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	3	0	28	44	91	175
Total	1	12	13	9	9	8	4	5	15	11	14	3	69	101	204	<b>478</b>

*Figure 4: Publications and articles per year.*

As visible in the table, there are significantly more articles from recent years. This is due to the fact that since Narendra Modi was voted to office in 2014, the NRLP is high on the political agenda, and therefore more reporting is taking place. 2002 was chosen as a starting point as in the years before no regular reporting has taken place.

The data was collected via online archives on the respective homepage of the newspapers and magazines, via google search parameters such as "site: search", and via the electronic database LexisNexis. The articles were collected using search items such as river link / linking / interlinking, river networking, inter-basin transfer, river scheme, river valley link and with names of projects taking place under the scheme of the NRLP (such as Polavaram, Ken-Betwa, Achankovil). However, though it is assumed that most articles were retrieved, no claim for an absolute completeness of the corpus of newspaper articles published on the issue can be made. Looking through the data, reoccurring topics were identified. As the amount of data is rather comprehensive, a quantitative assessment was done in a first step: *What are the issues raised in respect to the NRLP, the Ken-Betwa Project and the Polavaram Project? How often does which line of argument appear?* The thorough analysis of the data presented the following results: It is especially ecological and environment concerns, inter-state disputes, irrigation and agriculture issues as well as the social costs that were by far the issues most reported upon (see figure below).

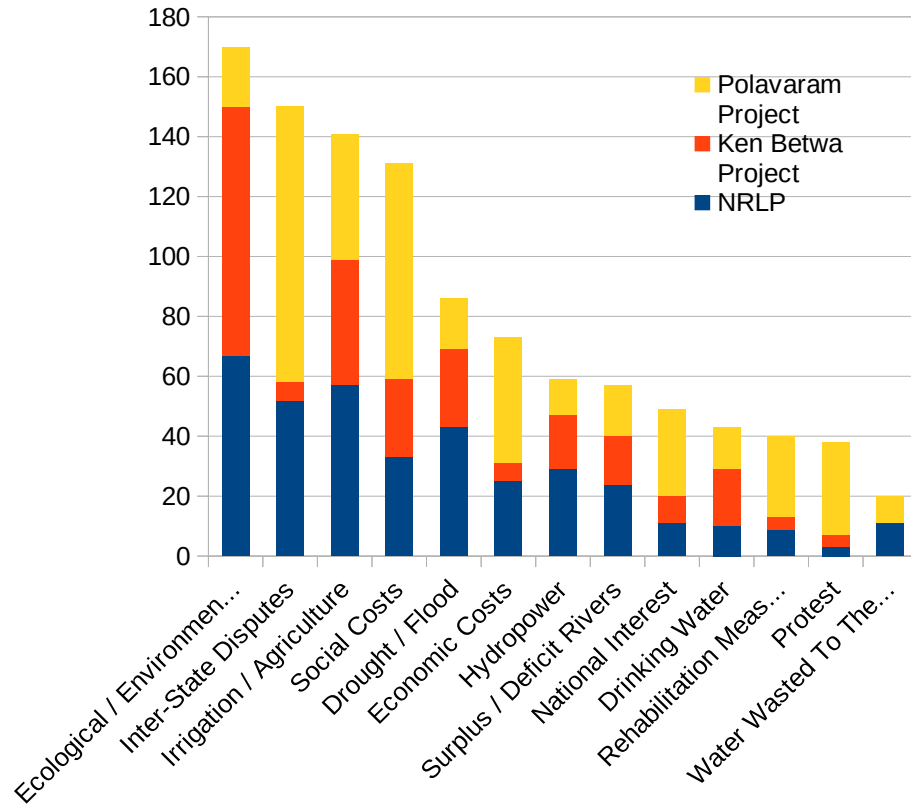


Figure 5: Codes and their rates of appearance in the media coverage in the case of the NRLP, Ken-Betwa Project and Polavaram Project.

The choice was made to use these topics as a lens to approach the three case studies. Furthermore a fourth category of political narratives was introduced to the analysis. Independent from the issue-based coding, this fourth category aims at looking more specifically at the role of political stakeholders and their role in shaping discourses. It is the following subquestions that the qualitative analysis of the data will address: *How are the arguments presented? What narratives and imaginary is being touched upon? Who gets a chance to speak in the media, with what content, and who does not?* It is with regard to the second part of the last

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question that the choice was made to also speak to the communities directly. Only by getting an understanding of the situation on the ground, is it possible to draw conclusions on who is not represented or possibly misrepresented in the media debates and also on how media reporting and the reality of those affected possibly differ.

This part of the dissertation relies on assumptions about discourse theory and works with Michel Foucault's understanding of "discursive power". Foucault explains how societies control, select and organize the discourse according to power positions from which people are enabled or hindered from participating. One of the aspects he describes is the exclusion of those who are seen as incapable of participating in the discourse (cf. i.e. Foucault, Seitter, and Konersmann 2014). He also deals with this topic in his works 'The Archaeology of Knowledge' and 'Discipline and Punish'. By using the example of nineteenth-century doctors, the French philosopher points to the question of who is being heard in a discourse:

First question: who is speaking? Who, among the totality of speaking individuals, is accorded the right to use this sort of language [...]? Who is qualified to do so? [...] What is the status of the individual who – alone – have the right, sanctioned by law or tradition, juridical defined or spontaneously accepted, to proffer such a discourse? (Foucault 1972, 55).

A discourse in Foucault's definition is a practice that systematically constructs the objects being talked about. It is always linked to the question of power; a system through which power circulates and knowledge is produced. As Hall describes Foucault's approach to discourses:

The knowledge which a discourse produces constitutes a kind of

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power, exercised over those who are "known". When the knowledge is exercised in practice, those who are "known" in a particular way will be subject [...] to it. This is always a power relation [...]. Those who produce the discourse also have the power to *make it true*. (Hall 1992, 294).

Applying Foucault's definition of 'discourse' to the Indian context, it is especially those local communities that are excluded from participating in the discourses, though they are affected the most by the project. They are being silenced by those in power who deny them the right to participate in the discourse by claiming to be the only one's with the appropriate knowledge to speak out, being in the position of power to define what is best for the state they rule, and for its inhabitants.

The analysis conducted in this dissertation will draw upon these consideration and employ the method of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as described by Teun van Dijk's, Dutch linguist and scholar in the field of discourse analysis. Critical Discourse Analysis "primarily studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (Dijk 2015, 466).

Concerning the analysis of discourse in newspapers in particularly, CDA scholar with a focus of newspaper analysis, John Richardson points out that there are five fundamental presuppositions about language that a CDA of newspapers needs to consider:

- 1) "Language is social" (Richardson 2007, 10),
- 2) "Language use enacts identity" (Richardson 2007, 11),
- 3) "Language use is always active" ("its is always directed at doing something") (Richardson 2007, 12),

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- 4) "Language use has power" (Richardson 2007, 13), and
- 5) "Language use is political" ("the logical outcome of assuming that language use is social and has power") (Richardson 2007, 13).

According to these five presuppositions, it has to be beard in mind that language is made by society but also influences the way society is constituted. As Richardson points out, language "represents social realities and [...] contributes to the production and reproduction of social reality or social life" (Richardson 2007, 10). Language has power, especially in the way its use can influence people's perceptions of situations. It can influence and shape discourses. As Richardson puts it: "it can reinforce beliefs; it can shape people's opinions not only of the world but also of their place and role in the world; [...] in sum, it can help shape social reality by shaping our views of social reality" (Richardson 2007, 13). These are important considerations when it comes to the analysis of media discourses in this dissertation: who is speaking and which language is used? How does that shape the discourse on the water projects? How does it shape the public perception of the projects if a certain language is used? The dissertation will use this perspective of CDA in order to look at the language and the power it emits to grasp a better understanding of the discourses surrounding large scale water infrastructure in India.

Next to the main chapter including the media analysis via the chosen newspapers and magazines, the dissertation will furthermore give an insight to the perspective on the ground. The reason for including the fieldwork is also one of opening up perspectives and giving the option of different perspectives. In contrast to the data derived from the newspapers, the aim of the interviews was to gain insight into the perspectives of those directly affected by the construction. The last chapter of the dissertation therefore relies on interviews conducted during fieldwork in 2012 in the areas directly affected by the Polavaram Project, as well as in the state's

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capital Hyderabad. The project was chosen as a suitable case study as it is the project the farthestmost implemented within the NRLP scheme. Also in other aspects it represents a typical choice in India for gigantic projects: rural, with mainly indigenous inhabitants, and low economic status. A prominent feature of large scale projects in India is often the large proportion of indigenous communities being affected by them. In the case of the Polavaram dam it is three out of every five evacuees that are members of Adivasi communities (cf. Bhushan and Murali 1994). The interviews conducted in the area were semi-standardized interviews as described by Berg (cf. Berg 2009, 107). Semi-standardized interviews have the advantage that whilst themes to be addressed and questions to be asked are prepared for the interview, it allows the interviewer to be flexible in the language used, in the order of questions, and allows for including other questions that might pop up in the course of the interview. As a semi-standardized approach was chosen, it allowed me to engage in what seemed more like a normal conversation rather than an interview, which might have helped as the interviewees could perceive the situation in a less formal way.

Access to the communities was mainly achieved through establishing connections to local non-governmental organisations (NGOs). All NGOs I accompanied, though different in their outline, are very small, local NGOs with one to four staff members. None of them is connected to large well-known NGOs, yet some of them are supported by external funding. Though with different emphasis, all of them work in the area of 'tribal welfare' and none of them explicitly takes a stand against the Polavaram Project, mainly because of fear of government suppressions in case of being branded 'anti-national' and thereby loosing their operability as NGO, through i.e. loosing their right for external funding, and thereby possibly loosing their jobs. In all of the NGOs cases, the dam project severely affects the population they work with on a daily basis. The NGO workers are therefore very aware of the situation in the villages and often try to find ways to improve the

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situation for those effected by the dam, for example through giving support with rehabilitation claims and land titles.

In total, 33 interviews were conducted with affected communities, researchers, social workers, lawyers, anti-dam activists and NGO workers in Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Apart from one NGO staff member from Hyderabad, all of the interview partners spoke out against the Polavaram Project in their interviews. The interview setting revealed that most of the interviewees from the NGO sector are strongly opinionated against the Polavaram Project, yet they stated that they do not publicly position themselves in opposition to the project out of the above mentioned fear of being branded 'anti-national'.

It should be noted that government officials, as well as farmers and industrialists likely to benefit from the dam project, were not included in the interviews. The choice was made, as it was the purpose of the fieldwork to highlight perspectives of those affected by the construction in a negative way i.e. through resettlement measures and to make voices be heard that otherwise might not be found within the hegemonic discourse. Surely insights from the point of view of the beneficiaries would provide interesting perspectives, yet these were not the point of attention in my research. I was rather interested in the situation of those at the margin, those that I assumed might experience the construction of the project in a different way than it is being portrayed through media channels. As a result, this part of the analysis mainly offers perspective of the project's opponents, as I was not able to find people affected by displacement or working with communities that were to be displaced that were in favour of the project.

Furthermore, it should be added that the interviews were conducted by me, a white female foreigner, which may have influenced the responses in many ways. In case of some NGOs that took me to the villages they work in, I had the

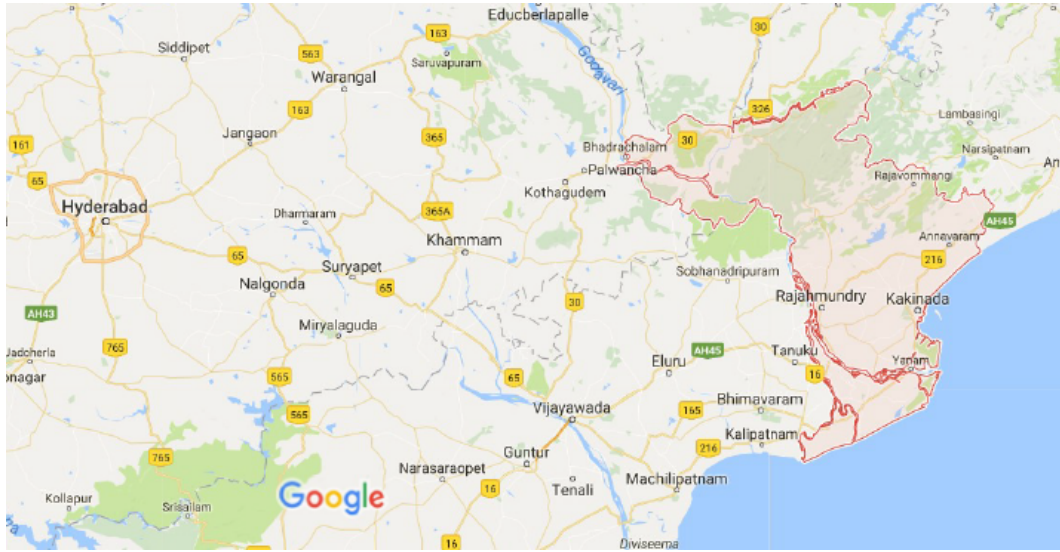


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impression that by the way in some locations traditional songs were sung to me and the spirituality of the communities were highlighted to a great extent, that a romanticised image of the communities as very 'traditional' and 'exotic' and only shown in their role as victims was presented to me, rather than communities very well aware of the world around them and 'modern' life. I can assume that this was presented to me, as it was expected that this perspective of 'tribal life' was the one that a white foreigner might be interested in seeing.

Yet I often found the situation to be quite different. I was introduced to communities very active in their fight against the dam, very aware of their role in Indian society and very articulate in their views and perspectives. One issue though appeared everywhere I went: the expectation that I would be able to change something about their situation: If not to stop the dam altogether, then at least to make sure that all the compensations would be paid, land titles would be given, and that I personally would make sure that the communities would not suffer from the construction. This was a difficulty I faced in several instances, and it was often, by local NGOs and affected communities alike, not understood that I would most probably not be able to make great changes to their situation.

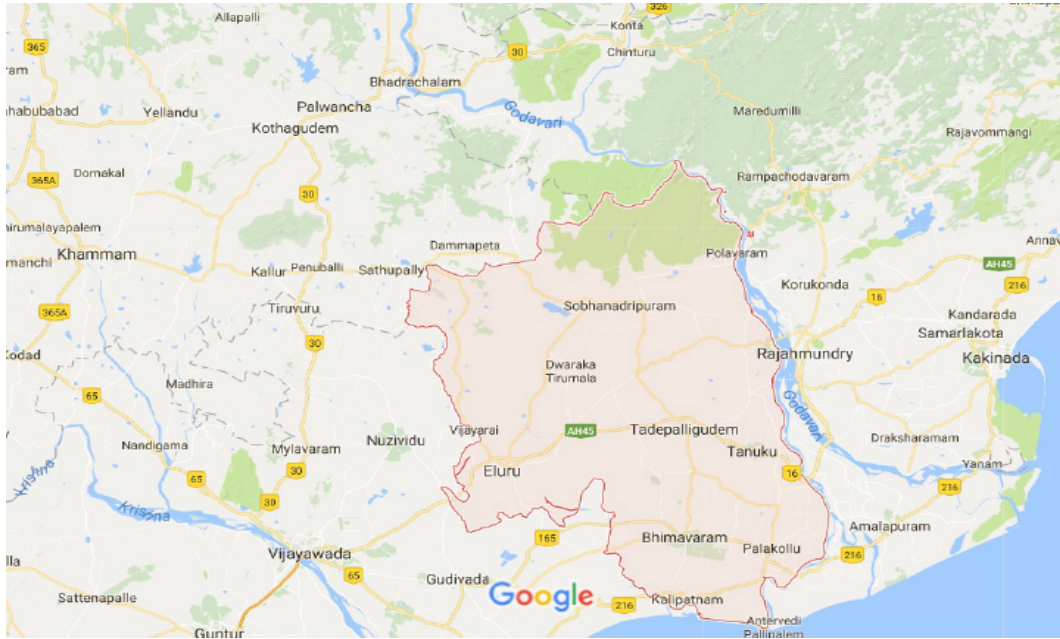
## Introduction



*Figure 6: East Godavari District is highlighted. Khammam, the capital of Khammam district of Telangana is found in the centre of the map (Google 2017).*

Geographically the interviews took place in Hyderabad, in Khammam District, now part of Telangana state, in the areas bordering the states of Chhattisgarh and Odisha on the Sabari river, which will be affected by the backlog of water once it is dammed, in the Chhattisgarh town of Konta, and in East Godavari District, where I had the chance to see the model colonies and to talk to people that have already been displaced (cf. Fig. 2 & Fig. 3). In East and in West Godavari I also visited the dam construction site and the canal works. The interviews sometimes took place with a single person, and occasionally with a larger group of village residents. Interviews were conducted in English, Telugu, Koya and Konda Reddy languages. For the interviews in Telugu, Koya and Konda Reddy languages, I worked with translators.

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*Figure 7: West Godavari District is highlighted. The town of Polavaram, which is near the dam construction side, can be found north of the city of Rajahmundry along the Godavari river. The first canal that is already operated connects Godavari to Krishna river (bottom left). On the top of the map the two border towns of Chinturu (Andhra Pradesh) and Konta (Chhattisgarh), affected by the dam construction through backlash of water along the Saberi river, are indicated (Google 2017).*

After providing insights into some of the parameters of this dissertation, I will now shortly present the way this work is structured: There are three main parts. Whilst the first part provides a historical contextualisation of large scale development schemes in India, especially through the lens of hegemonic discourse as portrayed in speeches by Indian Prime Ministers from Independence in 1947 until Modi's Independence Day speech in 2017, the second part is the main chapter of this dissertation and is dedicated to the media analysis. This second

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chapter includes a threefold structure by analysing firstly the discourse on the NRLP in general, secondly the Ken-Betwa Project and thirdly the Polavaram Project, before offering a short interim conclusion comparing the results of all three analysis. The third part of the dissertation is then dedicated to the local perspectives, using the example of the Polavaram Project, and evaluates the interviews conducted and the fieldwork in the area, before a final conclusion is drawn.

## **Chapter 1: Historical Contextualization**

### **1.1. Under British rule**

To give an insight into the political project of development through large scale infrastructure projects in India, the following chapter looks at the historical trajectories of the idea. During British colonial rule it was especially the concept of a 'civilizing mission' which pushed it on the agenda. The ideology of civilization and of 'improvement of humankind' served as the guiding principle of British legitimization of their rule in India (Mann 2004, 8). In order to justify their presence in India, images were created that called for the intervention of the 'civilized' Europeans. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century

historiography established the 'Oriental' picture of a weak and primitive people, unfit for self-government due to the crippling influence of long-lasting subjugation that, again, argued for a strong paternalistic government as the most appropriate form for an uncivilized people. Accordingly, the Indian population was placed in a master and servant, teacher and pupil, parent or child or [...] husband and wife relationship that justified the imposition of discipline, education and upbringing. In short, the 'civilizing mission' (Mann 2004, 6).

This 'civilizing mission' constituted, in part, of religious reforms (promoting Christian values), the spread of the English language, reforms of government, taxation, and laws and technological 'progress' such as the construction of railways. Ultimately the civilizing mission would however produce an outcome not necessarily in the interest of the colonial power, as "the colonized might become civilized and, hence, equal" (Mann 2004, 24). Yet in the 20<sup>th</sup> century,

especially during the Great Depression from 1929 to 1939, it became clear that despite all efforts the British civilizing mission in India had failed to modernize the country. In order to give a new justification for the continuity of colonial rule, development programmes were invented. The term changed, however the logic remained:

The notion of a colonial development 'programme' as part of an economic framework to justify colonial rule was born in the 1930s, when it was argued that a benevolent colonial regime was still preferable to concepts of home rule or self-government. [...] 'Development' became the modern term for 'civilizing', since it still operated on the principle of imagined differences and hierarchies. Consequently, the antonym 'underdevelopment' was introduced to the political-cum-economic discourse after 1945, with the colonies being on the threshold of independence" (Mann 2004, 16).

As Bassett points out, the urge for technological advancement was however also one used in campaigns *against* the British colonizers. In his analysis of Bal Tilak's newspapers *Mahratta*, an English-language publication, and *Kesari*, published in Marathi, in Pune in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bassett argues that both newspapers consistently argued for technological education and industrialization in order to "beat England at her own weapons" (Bassett 2016, 22). The newspapers were at the forefront of promoting technological education and the establishment of technical schools and referred to the US-American Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) as a role model, which later played a significant role in the establishment of the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs). The question Bassett's publication is guided by is "How did 'Indian' and 'technological' go from being mutually exclusive to being practically synonymous for the Indian middle class?" (Bassett 2016, 3). The 20<sup>th</sup> century strong promotion of

technological education in India is the answer he provides.

## **1.2. The Gandhi – Nehru Debate**

By the time independence was reached, colonial concepts have had their effects on the Indian elites and had been internalized to a certain degree by those. As Mann shows, this becomes for example apparent when Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi condemns of Western sciences and technology as being 'uncivilized'. Even though a rejection of a 'western modernity' takes place, dichotomous concepts such as 'civilized' and 'uncivilized' remain unquestioned and continue to be used (cf. Mann 2011). Even if the Indian elite worked for a country free from colonialism and any form of British involvement in the affairs of the state was rejected, "it was, nevertheless, a commonly held opinion that the country and the people had to be 'developed' for self-government as an independent Indian nation" (Mann 2011, 319). The underlying ideas of progress and dichotomous concepts such as 'development' and 'backwardness' were not questioned but rather constituted the foundation upon which the debates surrounding post-independent India were framed, which to some extent continue to shape political discourse in India. This is for example very visible in the until today official categorisation of people in "Other Backward Classes".

When India reached independence in 1947, different visions for its development were competing. On the one side there was Gandhi's idea on "decentralized development and village-based-rule" (Bose 2007, 196), on the other side the "Nehruvian state-socialist model of development with a focus on heavy industrialization, extensive economic planning, a strong state control on a mixed economy substantially integrated into the world capitalist economy" (Bose 2007, 196). Bassett argues that though Gandhi could be seen as the stereotypical untechnological Indian, his promotion of values of industrial societies such as

work ethic, time-consciousness and quantitative thinking, actually makes him "the most audacious engineer in a century of audacious engineers" (Bassett 2016, 80). Also Geraci points out that though Gandhi is often related to a "fundamentally anti-scientific worldview", his vision was in fact "deeply industrial, and technology grounded the spiritual life he advocated" (Geraci 2018, 45). He argues that Gandhi's rejection of consumer culture, accompanying industrialization and "modernity" is often confused with a rejection of technology per se. Gandhi refused modern technology in many cases, as he saw it as having a positive impact only on the rich, not on the poor. But he advocated local technologies; technologies that would benefit the poor. Geraci remarks "Gandhi desired to enchant science and technology on a human scale, to make it part of a lived experience of self-controlled individuals" (Geraci 2018, 48). He also points out that Gandhi's comments on the issue of technology were not always consistent, therefore complicating an easy subsumption of his stance.

At any rate, Bassett argues, Gandhi fought against the "empire of technology", against a nation dominated by the thoughts of technological advancement. Yet, he lost this struggle, which Bassett attributes not only to Nehru's assertiveness but also to Gandhi's followers, young Gandhians such as T. M. Shah or Bal Kalekar, which chose "MIT and modern technology over the Gandhian ideal of the charkha used in village services" (Bassett 2016, 308).

### **1.3. The Nehruvian State (1947-64)**

After Nehru's election as Prime Minister in 1947, it was soon clear that it was his vision which was to inform politics throughout the following decades. As Bose points out, the idea of catching up with neighbouring states and also with the 'Western' countries was a leading one in Nehru's development model and a constituent in the vision of the postcolonial Indian state (cf. Bose 2007).



Technology took on a major role in this venture. This becomes, for example, visible in Nehru's strong support for the establishment of IITs, which started to be established since 1951. The emphasis Nehru put on science and technology not only as an economic development model, but also as one that should transform the whole Indian society from a 'traditional' to a 'modern' society is reflected in his speeches. Speaking at the annual meeting of the Central Board of Irrigation and Power (CBIP) in 1953 he said:

I want all people, whether engineers or non-engineers, to possess an engineering approach to the problems facing them. The scientific approach means that a person has a systematic way of thinking and arrives at the reality by reasoning. The engineering approach would be a scientific approach coupled with the urge for creation, the urge to make and produce new things for the common good. When the people of a country have such an approach to their problems than the country progresses (Nehru 1958b, 3:120).

The quote illustrates how technology was seen as a way of 'rationalizing' the Indian mind. Addressing the issue in front of an informed audience, with many members of the CBIP being engineers themselves, one could read the speech as appealing directly to them and seeking partners in spreading the 'engineering approach'. Also in other speeches he repeatedly spoke on the necessity of breaking with old traditions in order to progress. The idea of a 'scientific temper' that Nehru put forward is one that all Prime Ministers succeeding him referred back to.

Yet, Nehru, once an apologist of the “temples of modern India”, started doubting the concept of large scale schemes as the years passed. This change in mind is little reported upon, but at the inaugural address at the annual meeting of the Central Board of Irrigation and Power in November 1958 he said:

The progress in the last ten or eleven years has shown our great desire to increase irrigation and power in this country. Some of our major river valley projects have become famous not only in India but outside India also. They have become symbols of big things we want to do. For some time past, however, I have been beginning to think that we are suffering from what we may call “disease of gigantism”. We want to show that we can build big dams and do big things. This is a dangerous outlook developing in India. I want our engineers to undertake big schemes in the country, but the idea of having big undertakings and doing big tasks for the sake of showing that we can do big things is not a good outlook at all. I think that while, inevitably, we shall have to undertake big schemes or tasks in this country, we should always remember that it is the ten thousand small tasks that count ultimately much more than a few big ones. [...] You have said now in your address that the cost of production of power in a small project is great. I am not at all sure if that is so, because the cost of a small project has to be judged after taking into account all the social upsets, upsets of the people moving out and their rehabilitation and many other things, associated with a big project. Also it takes a long time to build a big project. The small project, however, does not bring about these upsets nor does it involve such a large endeavour. However, we are not so much interested in the economics of it as in the fact that we would like to develop the resources all over India rather than in one place. While concentrated progress at any one place, no doubt, produces a fine show-piece and does enormous good in that place, it fails to deliver the good effects beyond a certain distance. Therefore, statistically you can show that what is happening in India, in human terms, does not reach the majority of our people. Therefore,

real value of a development lies in spreading its influence all over India so that more and more people can benefit by it (Nehru 1988, 172).

He further relates to involving “ordinary” people, in the projects; an idea very dear to him and closely related to the idea of “spreading a scientific temper”:

I should like you, apart from whether you are doing a big scheme or a small scheme, always to think of human beings involved. How they would be profited and to get their sympathy and understanding in the job. [...] From this point of view also I would urge you to take up small schemes which are easier for a person to understand and comprehend (Nehru 1988, 173).

Subramanian reflecting upon Nehru’s “change of heart” points out that it

was reflective of the end of the optimism of the 1950s, as India’s Second Five Year Plan (1956-61) seemed to be running into serious difficulties. More than any other sector, irrigation [...] was at the centre of the early post-colonial developmental state’s efforts. And therefore, understanding the late 1950s irrigation crisis is key to understanding this first big disappointment of post-colonial developmentalism (Subramanian 2018).

He further relates to a set of difficulties that had arisen with the regard to the building of irrigation infrastructure during that time. Among them is the issue of large structures being build, yet a great lack of constructing channels that would actually divert the water collected through these new structures, was found; resulting in an utilisation rate of the merely 48% of the resources available. He

remarks on the issue that “from the late 1950s to the present day, this crisis occupies centre stage in the discourse on large-scale irrigation systems in India” (Subramanian 2018). He further refers to “spectacular failures” such as the Kakrapar project in Gujarat, lack of channel maintenances and “improper design” of channels, as well as the “project planners’ inadequate understanding of agriculture and their consequent inability to fulfill the irrigation needs of their crops” as some of the aspects that caused this “end of optimism” (Subramanian 2018).

Though Nehru eventually did take a different stance towards large scale irrigation projects as the above discussed speech in which he refers to a 'disease of gigantism' shows, the politics of building large scale dams continued after him and continues until today: technology is used to bring a presumed 'modernity' to India. These monuments should not only demonstrate power and the technological abilities of the nation, but also continue to be seen as a means of spreading the often mentioned 'scientific temper' across the country. People involved in the construction, people encountering these huge constructs should, as Nehru put it, see the faith put into it by its engineers, just as old temples, mosques and cathedrals do (cf. Nehru 1958a, 1:89). The faith however is not to be seen as a religious one, but as a faith in science, in technology, in modernity. Looking at the continuous creation of large dams all over the country, this idea seems not to have changed since Nehru's early years – to his liking or not.

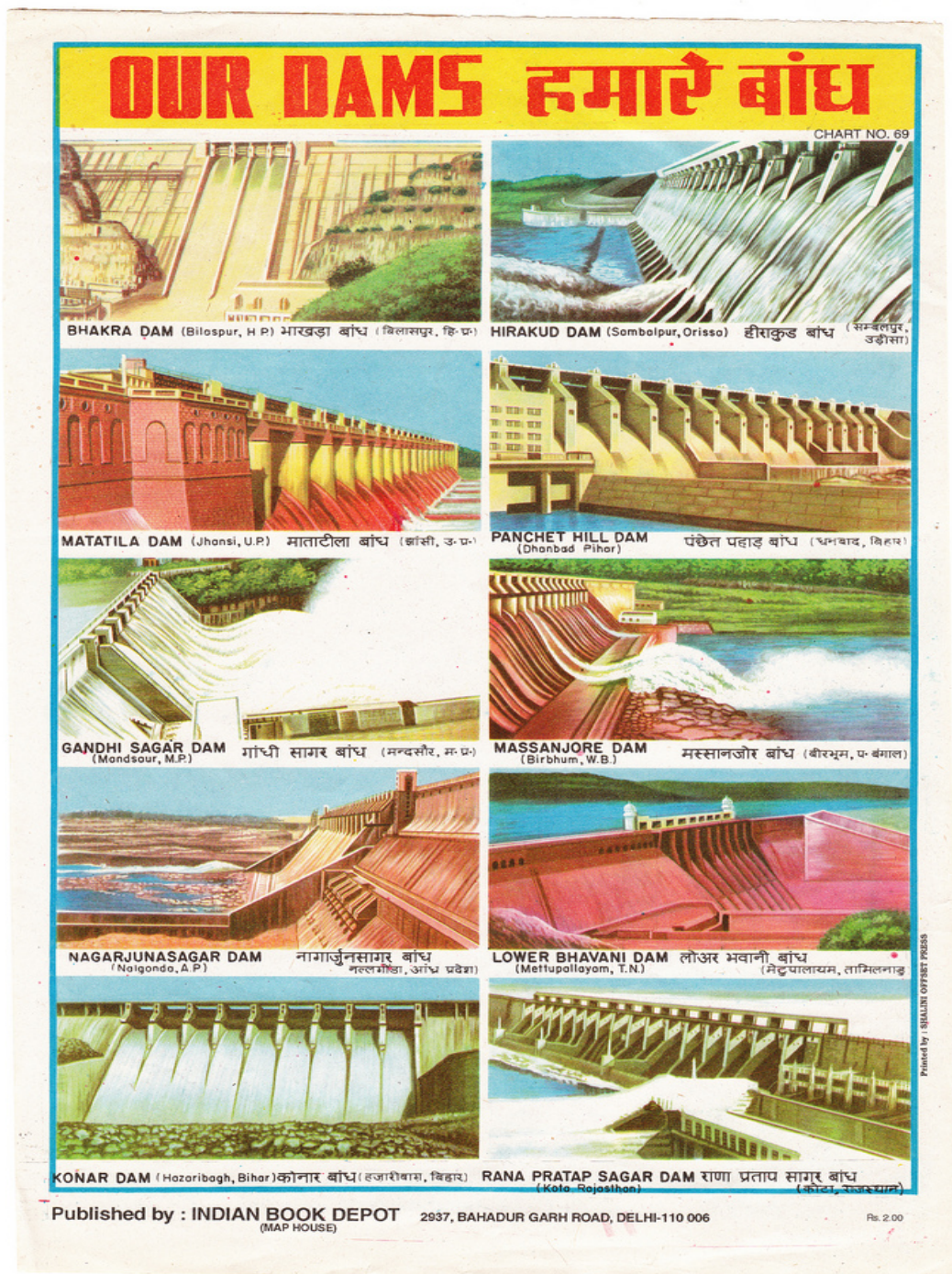


Figure 8: Indian School Material "Our Dams". Downloaded from: [https://farm5.static.flickr.com/4076/4925126792\\_365a41f8b7\\_b.jpg](https://farm5.static.flickr.com/4076/4925126792_365a41f8b7_b.jpg) (16/01/2018)

#### **1.4. Nehru's legacy: Indira and Rajiv Gandhi (1966-89)**

After a short period in which Lal Bahadur Shastri held the position as Prime Minister of the country from June 1964 until his death in January 1966, and two short interim periods in which Gulzarilal Nanda acted as Prime Minister (13 days in 1964 and in 1966 respectively), Indira Gandhi succeeded her father Jawaharlal Nehru in the office of Prime Minister. She held the office from 1966 until 1977 and again from 1980 until 1984, when she was assassinated. Her politics are especially remembered for the very controversial period of the Emergency, that she declared in 1975 for a period of nearly two years. During that time, Gandhi ruled by decree which allowed her to restrict civil liberties and to suspend elections. The period also involved a strong censoring of the press and drastic measures against her opponents. Hence the Emergency became an important topic in her speeches. In her Independence Day speech on August 15, 1976 from Delhi's Red Fort, she created a connection between criticism against her Emergency politics to the idea of not 'granting India to progress':

Today, we are criticised, because of some restrictions on newspapers and some arrests. The real reason is that our critics cannot tolerate the idea of a poor country like ours marching ahead without the assistance of others. My reply to them is only this: the more they condemn us, the greater will be our resolve to stick to our own path of progress (I. Gandhi 1984, 3:272).

In order to achieve this 'progress', Indira Gandhi followed her father in her emphasis on the scientific attitude. Yet, while eradicating old superstitions, rituals and routines she remarks that people should not lose their values, ideals and religion (I. Gandhi 1984, 3:202). Gandhi's speeches reflect the dichotomous construction of 'modernity' versus 'tradition' to a great extent. In many of her

speeches she stresses that “traditions” and a set of notions she places in close linkage to the idea of “traditions” need to be overcome to achieve modernity. On the “negative” side she places superstitions, traditional beliefs, rituals, and old irrational attitudes, whereas on the other, “positive” side she sees scientific temper, universal norms, a rational approach and enlightenment. In this set-up, technology functions in the intermediate: it is prescribed the role of enabling the transformation, of moving from the axis of tradition to the axis of modernity.

In a speech on 'Technology for Development' at the University of Roorke in 1967 on the occasion of her being awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Engineering she said: "Scientists and technologists should make it their mission to spread the scientific temper so that our forward march is not blocked by obstacles of superstition" (I. Gandhi 1973, 1:200). She thereby asks the future generation of educated scientists and technologists filling the audience to take on that mission. In an interview in Madrid in 1968 to the magazine *Revista De Occident*, most likely addressing a European audience, she verbalized this idea in the following way:

The advanced nations have to deal with two cultures, the scientific and the humanistic. Our third culture is the accumulation of traditional beliefs and rituals. The battle between science and superstition will not be a short one in our country. It can be won only through unrelenting effort. The steady expansion of technology will alter the social climate. Unfortunately, there are still parties and groups in India which are opposed to enlightenment (I. Gandhi 1973, 1:49).

Likewise, Mary C. Carras, in her biography on Indira Gandhi, points to Gandhi's strong positioning against such a "third culture" (Carras 1979, 43). Abolishing these "outdated laws and customs" is seen by Gandhi as a necessary step to pursue

social and economic progress (Carras 1979, 44). The idea of the 'scientific temper' continues to be the prominent concept that is called upon to reach that goal. The concept though coined by Nehru is very popular and reappearing in Gandhi's speeches. She also adds other imaginaries to the dichotomic construction, such as those of 'light' and 'darkness'. The former being associated with enlightenment, progress, and technology, the later being related to superstitions and irrationality. The darkness/ light metaphor can be found for example in her address on the occasion of the 1500th birthday anniversary celebrations of the mathematician and astronomer Aryabhata in 1976:

The inculcation of the scientific temper is now part of our duties as citizens of India. It is not an empty phrase. A scientific attitude is basic for any people to live more fully in the contemporary world. It is all the more necessary in a country where groups are waiting for opportunities to incite irrational prejudices in the name of religion, region or language, in a country which has to leap centuries to regain its elan. We want scientific thinking to destroy the superstition which has darkened our lives. We want science to light the spark of adventure, to bestow the gift of farseeing vision (I. Gandhi 1984, 3:450).

A second example is dated five years earlier and originates from an inaugural address of a nuclear research laboratory of the Indian Agricultural Research Institute in New Delhi:

Men and women who are interested in science will try to enlarge the areas of light and try to fight darkness. This is why we are all here at this function and I hope that this laboratory [...] will help to spread light amongst the farmers of India – light not only in the new



methodology and new practices but light also in their attitudes. We have in India to adopt not only scientific methods but a more rational thinking (I. Gandhi 1983, 2:442).

Just as Nehru did, she stressed the necessity of spreading a new mindset among the citizens to build the nation. Next to scientists it is especially engineers that seem to be seen essential to this project. At the Institution of Engineers in Calcutta in 1970 Indira Gandhi requested: "Engineers should build projects; even more, they should build the feeling of involvement in progress and development" (I. Gandhi 1983, 2:426). At a different occasion, with most likely a similar audience, the annual general meeting of the Institution of Engineers in 1971, she again points to the role that engineers should take within the nation-building process and their involvement with large scale infrastructure as a means of achieving the status of a 'built nation':

Engineers are not only builders in steel and concrete but also builders of the nation. They can give expression to their intellectual processes and creative vision only when the nation itself is pulsating with life, and there is intense activity and construction all around. Such activity would be concentrated in laboratories and workshops, and also on roads, bridges and dams (I. Gandhi 1983, 2:437).

There are several more occasions where she highlighted the roles of engineers in that process, for example by calling them "nation-builders and agents of the process of modernization" in a speech at the Institute of Engineers in Calcutta in 1970 (I. Gandhi 1983, 2:424). The role she prescribes to the scientists is again visible from the following quote:

We expect from our scientists the devotion to science as well as to

their country which will enable them to face this challenge to be partners in the gigantic task of reforming an ancient society through consent and co-operation. And this we must do by remaining vibrantly and dynamically Indian, by sweeping away the cobwebs of superstition, hypocrisy and humbug [...]. An Indian need have no conflict with modern man (I. Gandhi 1983, 2:417).

Again, one has to keep in mind the audience that was addressed: she was speaking at the Indian Science Congress, a public likely to sympathise with her objectives. But also when addressing the whole country, the 'common people', the rhetoric of moving from 'tradition' towards 'modernity' remained. Such as in a radio broadcast to the nation in 1966 where she, just as Nehru did, assigned dams a prominent position in creating a 'modern India'. On the opening of a new dam she said: "What we are seeing today is the rebirth of India, a new India, in transition from a traditional to a modern society" (I. Gandhi 1973, 1:104).

A further important aspect of her discursive framing of progress and development is the question of the role of western influence on India's path to 'modernity', a topic she addressed at the Indian Science Congress in Bangalore in 1971:

So dazzled have we been by recent developments in the science and technology of Europe and North America, that we have come to regard all science and technology as a Western phenomenon. Even our scientists regarded this as an import which should make no difference to inherited ways of thought. Culture cannot be imposed from outside but must develop from the people themselves. It was my father's endeavour to make science an organic part of our national life. He wanted the country to become science-minded, and our scientists to be nation-minded. Science is an essential ingredient of the growth

principle (I. Gandhi 1983, 2:419).

Likewise, she used the opportunity speaking on the need for inexpensive medicine at the inauguration of the Library and Museum of the Institute of History of Medicine and Medical Research, to point out that "Modernisation cannot be imported, it has to grow out of our own soil in order to take root. That alone is real transformation" (I. Gandhi 1983, 2:427). In line with debates on modernity, multiple modernities or indigenous modernities she calls for 'doing things the Indian way'. This also becomes apparent in her speech addressing the National Committee on Environmental Planning and Coordination in 1972:

To most people progress has become synonymous with imitation of western models but wherever we have followed models from the industrial society and have been insensitive to our own circumstances the results have not been happy. The time has come for us to think deeply about the kind of progress we want (I. Gandhi 1983, 2:443).

Similarly, at an address at a community science centre in Ahmedabad in 1973 Indira Gandhi points out that:

Today a great many people feel that to be modern is to be westernised, to adopt Western standards or Western ways. Now, there is much good in the West and I would be the last to decry it, but if this makes us to reject what is good in ourselves then that diminishes our personality as a people. If it makes us look at the West only through westernised eyes then that also is something that diminishes our capacity to learn as well as to teach. So, when I say that we should have a scientific attitude, I mean that we should have the attitude of rational thoughts, of original thought and the habit of observing and absorbing what is

around us and using it too, for the purpose (I. Gandhi 1984, 3:408).

At several occasions she stresses the point that though she aims for a transformation in society towards rationality and away from 'old irrational attitudes', Indian values and traditions should still not get lost. This goes hand in hand with her idea of an 'Indian way' of modernizing the country:

The future cannot be built on the past but on our present effort. Does this mean that one should cut oneself adrift from spiritual anchorage? On the contrary, I believe that it is only through a creative fusion of science with spirituality, with the deep and abiding values of our philosophy, that we can survive and prosper. But spirituality and philosophy should not be confused with superstition (I. Gandhi 1973, 1:202).

Similarly, she repeatedly pointed out, that technology needs to be adequate to the Indian circumstances. One example for that is her speech given at the Conference on the Promotion and Utilisation of Science and Technology in Afro-Asian Countries in New Delhi in 1966 (cf. I. Gandhi 1973, 1:185).

After Indira Gandhi's assassination, it was her son Rajiv Gandhi who took office as prime minister in 1984. In line with his predecessors, Rajiv Gandhi also identified "technology [as] the key to progress" (R. Gandhi 1987, 1:146) and stresses:

What will help us to develop a real base for science and technology is an involvement of the average person with science and technology [...]. Unless this scientific temper, [...], really seeps down to our society, we [...] are just not being allowed to develop (R. Gandhi

1987, 1:179).<sup>7</sup>

However, other than Nehru and Indira Gandhi, he is keen on rejoining tradition with modernity. His speeches often focus on the spiritual sphere that should not be forgotten. He tries to fuse the axes previously constructed as opposing entities, as his inaugural address to the Second World Congress on Engineering and Environment in 1985 demonstrates:

For thousands of years, India has developed more in the spiritual direction than in the material direction. [...] With the technological revolution coming into India, there has been some tension between the two directions. We have developed our technology. We have developed our industries and we have found ourselves more and more separated from our traditional spiritual depth and strength. [...] Today, we once more look towards building both aspects equally (R. Gandhi 1987, 1:167).

### **1.5. Discursive shifts since India's economic liberalisation (1991-2014)**

With the economic liberalization of India under prime minister Narasimha Rao in the 1990s<sup>8</sup>, speeches underwent important changes. These changes took place in the background of the economic crisis of 1991, in which many new reforms were

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<sup>7</sup> The speech was held as an inaugural address to the conference on 'Science and Technology in India' in 1985.

<sup>8</sup> Research suggests that the changes in India's economic policies did not occur as late as 1991, with the fiscal crisis, but that the foundations for the changes taken place in 1991 were already laid at a much earlier stage. It is for example Vanita Shastri that point out that it has been since the 1980s, and especially under Rajiv Gandhi, that a shift in policy discourses took place (cf. Shastri 1997).

implemented. Yet as Shastri remarks “the extent of the reform was not just a response to the economic crisis [...] State structures were able to convert the crisis into a window of opportunity for more extensive liberalization” (Shastri 1997, 44). It is also pointed out, that this large scale reforms were only possible through extensive work in the direction of liberalization that had already been taken place in the preceding years.

Since that time a shift in the discourse on 'development' can be identified. As Shastri highlights:

In the Indian context, it must be kept in mind that the socialist-ideological mindset of the earlier policy-mix has a pervasive influence on the politico-economic discourse. The country has a long commitment to socialism and central planning. A large poor population and a functioning democracy have been important compulsions in the minds of the politicians. The move to a more market-oriented system was typically seen as dismantling the social net that had been built over the years (Shastri 1997, 47).

She furthermore points out that whilst Rajiv Gandhi was in power, a drastic change in economic policy would, i.a. for the above mentioned reason, have most likely created a large outcry. But for Rao the situation was a different one: He was more widely accepted and “was in fact known for his cautious approach. The fact that a person who had remained in the background earlier, but was also known for his intellectual capabilities, was sponsoring the reforms gave them credence” (Shastri 1997, 51).

In the role of the reformer of the Indian economy, Rao's speeches differ from those of his predecessors. Rather than speaking about 'Indianness', and spirituality

it was the economy and the financialization of the economy that became the focus of speeches. Moving away from a language that has previously often been inspired by socialism, a different understanding of concepts such as “growth” and “progress” were now discursively shaped; an understanding that did not put welfare of the citizens in the centre of attention, but profit. The idea of using technology to foster the process of development however remained. Whilst inaugurating the Indian Science Congress Rao for example pointed out: "We in this country must [...] endeavour to muster technological strategies as vehicles for development" (Narasimha Rao 1995, 3:266).

Yet in relation to water projects, he also referred to images of spirituality, for example when speaking on a project on the Godavari river: "Godavari flows here. We call it our "Mother". It is not proper that water from "Godavari talli (mother)" is denied to her children and gets wasted in the ocean" (Narasimha Rao 1994, 2:154). In this image the river is the mother providing water to her children, the people living off the river. It also includes the notion that if the water is not used before reaching the sea, it is wasted. Yet, as we will later see especially in the case of the Polavaram Project, this is a dangerous idea, insofar as the ecosystem is designed to have water flowing out to the sea. Without sufficient fresh water outflow, soil saltification is taking place in areas close to the coast and mangroves suffer to a great extent. Yet Rao is not the first one presenting the image, it is evoked repeatedly in relation to dam building.

After Rao's turn as a Prime Minister ended in 1996, it was Vajpayee that came to power – a strong supporter of the NRLP. Vajpayee referred back to Nehru's famous statement of dams being the temples of modern India during a speech he gave at the opening of an IT park in Bangalore in 2001:

It seems to me that coming to Infosys City is also like coming to a

temple – but a temple of a different kind. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, our first Prime Minister, has called factories and dams "Temples of Modern India", thereby underscoring their importance in nation-building. In today's New Economy, I think that the new temples of modern India are our information technology parks and the campuses of software companies (Vajpayee 2002, 169).

As seen from the quote, it is new technologies like the IT sector that now enter the scene. This new technologies however are presented, just as technology always has been, as driving forces in 'modernizing' India. Also under Manmohan Singh the notion of involving the 'common people', the idea of scientific temper that needs to be spread to move from tradition towards modernity is still there. In his Independence Day speech in 2007, speaking to the general public of India and being broadcast all over the nation, he said:

We need to promote a scientific outlook, inculcate a scientific temper and foster a more enlightened and modern outlook in our people. We should once again regain that position as a modern, knowledge-based culture where science and technology are used to overcome age-old problems of mass-poverty, ignorance and disease (M. Singh 2008, 4:13).

Here again the axes manifest themselves: positively connoted in Singh's speech are science, technology, enlightenment, being modern, knowledge; whereas the other axis includes poverty, ignorance and disease. The terms positively referred to, should take on the role of making it possible to overcome the negative. Technological solutions to social problems still seem to be the answer.



### **1.6. Current outlook (since 2014)**

Similarly, current prime minister Narendra Modi believes in technological solutions in order to achieve "progress and prosperity" (Borah 2015). Positive references to the ancient culture and traditions of India can be found in his speeches, as might be expected from a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader. Yet in general it can be said, that it seems that since Rao's term, the speeches by the prime ministers seem to have become more carefully formulated, less open in stating opinions and rather in avoidance of controversial topics.

Modi's Independence Day speech from 2017 is a good example for the prominent role that continues to be given to technology in 'development' activities. In his speech several references to technological advancement and the use of technology to achieve progress of the nation can be found. Modi for example points out that his aim is to create "a New India [...] where modern science and technology play an important role in bringing glory for the nation in the global arena" (TIME magazine 2017). Areas in which technology play an important part referred to include the fight against black money and corruption, banking systems and digital currency in general as well as geo-technology and space-technology. The examples furthermore include:

Today roads are being built at twice the speed. The railway tracks are being laid at double the speed. More than 14 thousand villages that were hitherto shrouded in darkness even after Independence, have been provided with electricity. Bank accounts of 29 crore people have been opened, more than 9 crore farmers have got Soil Health Card. More than 2 crore poor mothers and sisters are no longer using the fuel wood and using LPG gas stove now. The poor tribals have gained faith in the system. The person at the last mile of development now

joins the mainstream and the nation is marching ahead (TIME magazine 2017).

The interconnection between development and technology he creates in his speech is very visible especially in the last sentence, which highlights that it is the aim to integrate the "poor tribals" into mainstream society through the means of technology. According to Modi, this integration is a fundamental part of the nation's progress, however if the path of development envisioned by him is necessarily one that the Adivasi population is grateful to be part of or if maybe different visions of development might be competing here, is placed outside the brackets.

Though Modi refrains from commenting directly on religious issues, religiosity and spirituality are nonetheless reappearing features of his speeches and seem not to stand in any contradiction with the idea of technology. This aspect is also visible in his Independence Day speech when he points out:

We are working, but if we do so in the spirit of working for the glory of mother India, for the divinity of mother India, if we do it to rid our countrymen of poverty, if we do it to properly weave our social fabric, if we discharge our duties with feelings towards the country, if we do it with a sense of devotion to our country, if we do our work by dedicating it to the country, then the achievements will be much more (TIME magazine 2017).

Modi connects the idea of spirituality directly to the nation itself. Calling on worshipping the "divinity of mother India" and working for "her", he provokes the image of the country being a goddess to be served. The use of technology therein seems to be the way indicated by him to do so. Interestingly Modi also uses his

speeches to directly refer to large scale water development schemes, a topic otherwise outside of the brackets in speeches by Prime Ministers since Nehru, for example during a visit to the state of Arunachal Pradesh in 2015 when he promised the audience progress, prosperity and happiness through hydro projects involving the creation of large dams (cf. Borah 2015).

### **1.7. From British Colonial Rule to Modi: Unchanged Paradigms?**

As seen from the preceded reflections, ties to the developmental imagination of the British rule continue to exist in the Indian context. Yet it was especially under India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru that dam building gained the role of leading India forward, making it strong by removing the poverty of its people, as stated by Nehru in his speeches (cf. i.e. Nehru 1958b, 3:2). Over 60 years later these ideas do not seem to have changed: India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi promises progress, prosperity and happiness through dam building (cf. Borah 2015). Leading India forward and progress, removing poverty and prosperity – the comparison of the two statements shows a lot of similarities. Are we confronted with a continuation of a storyline of 'progress' and 'prosperity' in regard to discourses on large scale water projects from Nehru's times until today, or is it rather a revival of Nehru's legitimization strategies that we are observing?

After looking at more than 3000 political speeches from Indian Prime Ministers from 1947 until today, it can be said that the discourse of progress and development via technology is a continuous one, found throughout all of the speeches. The idea of a dam as a symbol of 'modernity' was summarized by Nehru in his famous statement on dams being the 'temples of modern India'. His idea of moving from 'backwardness' towards a 'modern' nation through dam projects, as mentioned before, was very prominent in his speeches. He drew his inspiration for these large scale projects from the US, especially the Tennessee Valley Project,

and from projects in Soviet Russia. To him river valley schemes were "the basis of all future growth" (cf. Nehru 1958a, 1:114). Nehru depicted a movement away from 'backwardness' and 'traditions' through technology towards a modern state. In this movement he saw engineers in taking on a leading role. Large scale projects were a feature of his nation-building efforts. They should also serve as monuments of the nation, monuments serving to show off what India is able to achieve. This notion is very visible in the school material displaying India's largest dams (cf. Figure 8): the monuments are erected for a nation proud of its achievements.

Along with his focus on dams it was Nehru's reoccurring theme to bring a scientific attitude to India, to spread it among the people. To do so according to him old ideologies and traditions were have to be left behind. However later in his life, Nehru spoke of the "disease of giganticism", as discussed in chapter 1.3. This change of mind is not so much noted. All Prime Ministers after Nehru always referred back to his 'temples of modern India', whereas Nehru's later doubts were seldom addressed.

Indira Gandhi followed her father in her emphasis on the scientific attitude that is needed in order to make India progress. While eradicating old superstitions, rituals and routines she remarks that people should not loose their values, ideals and religion (I. Gandhi 1973, 1:202). We can see that, as Nehru did, she also assigned dams a prominent position in creating a 'modern India'. During Rajiv Gandhi's time in office, it can be remarked that there was a strong link between technology to the development of spirituality in his speeches. Irrespective of the context of his speech, he always emphasized the importance of reconciling spirituality with progress (cf. i.e. R. Gandhi 1987, 1:134).

With the economic liberalization of India in the 1990s, also the speeches

underwent a fundamental change. Since Narasimha Rao's term as Prime Minister, a big shift in the discourse on 'progress' can be identified. Rather than speaking about 'Indianness', spirituality etc. the talk was about the economy. Vajpayee, a strong advocate of the NRLP repeatedly drew an image of a: strong, prosperous, achieving, winning, successful and self-confident India summarized in the slogan 'India is on the move'. In reference to Nehru he called IT parks "India's new temples" (Vajpayee 2002, 169). Also Manmohan Singh referred back to Nehru and his idea of a scientific temper in order to become modern, and the focus on science and technology, continued to be called upon (M. Singh 2008, 4:13).

Looking at the speeches reveals that large scale water projects in general were not a regular topic for public speeches for the Prime Ministers after Nehru and before Modi. Even Vajpayee as a supporter of the NRLP, has not publicly spoken about it. Only now with Modi in office change is taking place. He is pushing forward with the project on high speed and, other than Vajpayee, also speaks about it. In his speeches Modi is framing the project especially in regard of helping farmers across the country through creating better irrigation facilities – and, as said before, as a way to achieve happiness, prosperity and progress. The chapter disclosed that since independence development via technology has always been an important topic in the political discourse, however it could be seen as a revival that like Nehru long before him, Modi also makes water projects themselves a topic again. Debates on technology in India have a long history going back to British colonial times and also to anti-British activism. These histories and discourse lines should be kept in mind when looking at today's media debates on the issue of large scale water infrastructure in the Indian context, as they serve to understand the origins of some of today's ideas.

## Chapter 2: Media Analysis

### 2.1. The National River Link Project

#### 2.1.1. Quantitative Aspects of the Media Analysis

The media discourse on the NRLP analysed in the following part will be looked at through the lens of the five mentioned newspapers and magazines: *Hindustan Times*, *Down to Earth*, *India Today*, *The Times of India*, and *The Hindu*. The collected data includes altogether 150 articles, whereof most articles derive from *Hindustan Times* (41 articles) and the least from *India Today* (19 articles). All of them were published between 2002 and 2016, though it is especially the years 2003, 2004 and from 2014 onwards that the reporting has taken place as the following table indicates:

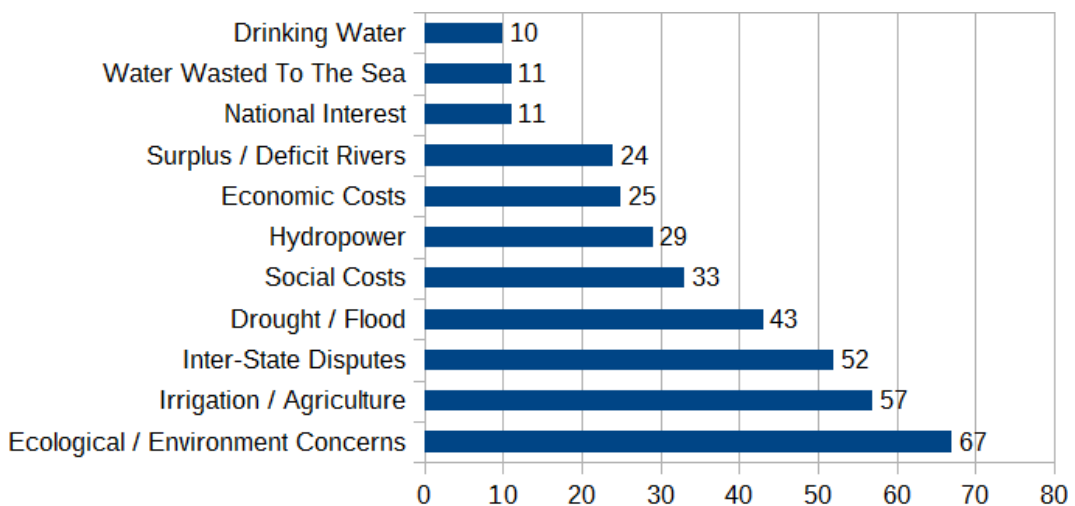
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Hindustan Times	0	2	3	2	5	6	3	3	1	0	1	0	4	6	5	41
Down to Earth	1	3	6	3	1	0	0	0	0	1	3	1	0	1	2	22
India Today	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	3	8	19
Times of India	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	14	7	8	35
The Hindu	0	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	4	10	12	33
Total	1	12	12	5	7	6	3	3	1	2	10	1	25	27	35	150

Figure 9: Publications and numbers of articles on the NRLP per year

The rise in publications on the NRLP in the years 2003 and 2004 can be explained by then Prime Minister Vajpayee strongly pushing for the implementation of the project. In this late phase of his leadership, the project was high on the agenda of his government which was picked up by the media. After Vajpayee's term, between 2004 and 2014, it was Congress member Singh who filled the position of Prime Minister, and his government distanced itself from the NRLP. This can be seen as the reason for a comparatively sparse reporting during that period. The rise in 2012 is the result of the Supreme Court's ruling in favour of a fast

implementation of the NRLP, which called upon the government to act on the issue. In 2014 the BJP came to rule. Under Modi the NRLP is strongly campaigned for, which once again the media reporting picks up on.

An issue-based view of the data material provides insights on the most important topics and ideas that are debated with regard to the NRLP in the newspapers. The following figure illustrate the topics that appear most often (starting from ten references).



*Figure 10: Codes and their rates of appearance (from ten references on) in the media coverage on the NRLP.*

As rendered visible, the ecological and environmental concerns are debated most. Also the topics of irrigation and agriculture, mainly linked to the government's promise of achieving more irrigation and thereby higher agricultural outcomes through the NRLP, is among the most discussed issues. Inter-state disputes between different states on the issue of water sharing and link building is the third most discussed topic, whereas social costs of the project are mentioned 33 times.

As compared to the accumulated numbers of all three discussed cases, as seen in the chapter on methodology and data, the issue of drought and flood is mentioned more often, being the fourth most discussed issue, whereas the social costs are comparatively less discussed, ranking fifth. To start off, the following subchapter will consider the environment discourse on the NRLP, before moving towards the other issues.

### **2.1.2. Environment Discourse**

As the previous numbers have shown, ecological and environmental concerns are taking up a large share of newspaper coverage on the NRLP. The following part will firstly present the general perspective used in the articles and the stances that the newspaper reporters take with regard to the NRLP and its environmental consequences, before addressing the opponents and proponents that are given a voice in the reporting and how they are addressing their concerns.

In one of the first articles from the data collection, Aiya in an article published in *India Today* in 2003 points towards the risks of the destruction of eco-systems such as desertification that might occur as well as the danger of building dams in seismic prone zones. Previous historical examples of problematic large scale water projects are also referred to, such as the Aral Sea which suffered due to water transfer at the times of Soviet rule (cf. Aiya 2003). An article in *Hindustan Times* published a few months later similarly points to severe ecological effects, but in a more radical wording than used by Aiya:

Critics point to the fact that playing with nature on such a grand scale can only amount to suicidal folly. Given the adverse effects that much smaller projects have already resulted in, they point to the urgent need to carry out impact assessment studies including those of loss of



biodiversity, reduction in downstream flows, reduction of freshwater inflows into the sea and the consequent impacts on aquatic life (Hindustan Times 2003).

Both articles are not directly presenting the author's opinions but refer to critics and their concerns. However, the positioning of the journalists is rather unconcealed with expressions such as "suicidal folly" used. Critics are given significant space in the reporting without offering much space to opposing points of view.

P. Singh and Singh in an article from March 2004 published in *Down to Earth* refer to the issue of water pollution, which is said to get worse as rivers are connected, as previously healthy rivers will receive polluted water: "the new areas that will be river-fed after the introduction of the scheme may experience crop failures or rotting due to alien compounds carried into their streams from the polluted Ganga" (Pankaj Singh and Singh 2004). The article criticizes that thorough environmental impact assessment and feasibility studies of the proposed links have not been conducted. Also a 2007 *Hindustan Times*' article refers to the NRLP as a "pie-in-the-sky scheme" that is a "recipe for disaster" (Hindustan Times 2007). The article points to ecological problems such as soil erosion and silting arising from the interlinking of rivers.

Sharma in *India Today* takes a similar stand by calling it "a pet project of the BJP-led NDA [National Democratic Alliance] government in early 2002 [...] supported by the saffron brigade<sup>9</sup>". The article further refers to the NRLP as being

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9 "Saffron brigade" is a neologism referring to the symbolic use of the colour saffron by right-wing Hindu nationalists in India and is often connoted with the ruling Hindu nationalist BJP Party and other Hindu nationalist organisations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Also

considered a nationalist project and claims that the stakeholders "conveniently overlooked" the "ecological fallout" of the project. Sharma further utters the hope that the "saffron parties" will come to realize the environmental consequences of the project (Sharma 2012a). In another article published in *India Today* he similarly refers to the "enormous" costs of the project with regard to ecological, economic and social aspects (Sharma 2012b). He further adds that "the NDA government wanted to push this project as a 'nationalist' dream a decade ago" (Sharma 2012b). Narain in *Down to Earth* points to another aspect of the NRLP: The assumption that floodwater can easily be channelized is questioned and it is discussed that this would require enormous storage facilities which have "massive environmental impacts not considered in the scheme" (Narain 2012).

The Soviet example previously used by Aiya pops up once more over a decade later in an article by D'Monte published in *Hindustan Times*, referring to its "disastrous Soviet precedent". He uses the term "megalomania" to describe the 1930s USSR's river projects which aimed at not letting water flow "wastefully into the sea" – a term also used in India with regard to the NRLP today, as the author points out (D'Monte 2014). The idea of letting water flow to the sea unused, is an argument that proponents of the NRLP continuously present and which also echoes in the news coverage (cf. i.e. The Times of India 2014a; B. P. Singh 2014). Yet it is also often challenged by critics that point to the very use of the water going out to the sea. Without fresh water flowing out, it is argued that sea water intrusion will take place, resulting in soil and groundwater salination, in disruption of the marine water system (cf. The Times of India 2014f), and even in effects on the "amount, duration and spatial distribution of monsoon" rain that

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the terms "Saffronisation" referring to Hindu nationalist Policies or "Saffron Terror" referring to violence perpetrated by Hindu nationalists, such as for example the Gujarat riots from 2002, are being used.

might occur (Kuttoo 2015).

Binoy in a lead article in *The Hindu's* opinion section connects the question of ecological concerns with a broader set of issues and asks:

Will the interlinking project really be the magic wand to reduce water scarcity as is being claimed? Whose experiences of scarcity and struggles for livelihood will it resolve? And what will be the financial and, most importantly, the ecological costs of that process? (Binoy 2014).

A straightforward critique of the NRLP and its proponents is offered. She links the critique not only to the ecological costs, but emphasizes power imbalances in the construction. The article implies that the project is not necessarily going to serve the whole population, but rather a specific section of society.

So far the mentioned articles render visible that no clear lines are cut between an environmental and a displacement or social consequences critique, rather both aspects seem to go hand in hand. The political intentions are being scrutinized. Baviskar's article in *India Today* is another example for the way criticism is articulated not by focusing on one issue, but by offering a rather broad perspective. She speaks of the "post-Independence epidemic of dam-building" and highlights its drastic consequences such as "ruined riverine ecosystems, millions of displaced people and colossal wastage of water for modest gains". Furthermore she charges "the same builder-bureaucrat consortium that backs big dams" with pushing the NRLP project whilst calling its cost "mind-boggling". The article then uses the image of river systems being "treated like plumbing": "installing an elbow joint here and turning a tap there". Her critique of the authorities involved in implementing the NRLP is eventually put in the nutshell with her final rhetoric

question: "But can a government bent upon accelerating mining in forested hills that form the catchment of peninsular rivers be expected to grasp this basic truth?" (Baviskar 2016).

As these examples have shown, the newspaper and magazine articles takes on a very critical stance towards the ecological issues arising from the NRLP scheme. The words used, such as "recipe for disaster", "pie-in-the-sky scheme", "suicidal folly", "ecological fallout", "massive environmental impacts", "disastrous", "ruined riverine ecosystems", "epidemic of dam-building", or "mind-boggling costs", make no pretence of the positions taken on by the journalists publishing on the NRLP and its ecological consequences in the analysed magazines and newspapers.

Within the reporting there are specific actors and organizations that are given a voice. One of these NRLP opponents often quoted is Himanshu Thakkar, coordinator of the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP). As a well known water activist, interviews with him on the issue of the NRLP appeared in most of the analysed newspapers and magazines (cf. Seth 2012; Uttam 2015; Dasgupta 2016; Jolly 2016; Koshy and Bansal 2016). Uttam, in an article published by *Hindustan Times*, quotes Thakkar referring to "deforestation, displacement of people and [an] increase [in] the impact of climate change" as consequences of large scale river schemes. Thakkar also mentions alternative ways to gain the same results as promised by the NRLP and points for example to water harvesting and watershed management methods whilst accusing the government of not considering these other options (Uttam 2015). Once again environment and social costs are not separated, but are both articulated as closely linked entities within the critique.

Next to Thakkar, another reappearing figure is Jairam Ramesh, former Union

Minister of Rural Development and Minister of State at the Ministry of Environment and Forest under Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. *Hindustan Times* quotes him saying that the NRLP would be a "human, ecological and economic disaster for the country" (Hindustan Times 2009b). He repeatedly positions himself against the NRLP (cf. i.e. Hindustan Times 2009c). Nandi, a *The Times of India* reporter, reports for example upon a talk that Ramesh held at an event taking place in the context of the Delhi literature festival. She writes:

Jairam Ramesh said all was fine with the concept of linking rivers except "some minor problems" like relocating millions of people, large swathes of forests getting submerged and if you link international rivers like Ganga to Cauvery, Bangladesh has warned us of taking the matter to the United Nations. "It's a very macho project but I am not persuaded by it," he said, the audience seemed amused by the wit (Nandi 2015).

Another prominent figure joining Ramesh in the public articulation of their concerns regarding the NRLP is Rahul Gandhi. In 2009 *Hindustan Times* quoted him saying that river linking "can lead to an ecological disaster". Likewise former Water Resources Ministry Secretary Iyer publicly addresses the environmental concerns. He has also published on the issue (cf. Iyer 2012, 2014) and is for example quoted in an article published by *Down to Earth* (cf. Down to Earth 2002) and in Aiya's article, published in *India Today* (cf. Aiya 2003). The latter also refers to activist Medha Patkar, well known for her engagement in the Narmada struggle, who "describes it [the NRLP] as playing politics with the river eco-system" (Aiya 2003).

Other opponents that are quoted include for example Gopal Sharma, regional in-charge of Zoological Survey of India (cf. Hindustan Times 2015b), Indian River

Valley Network Convenor Kumar Kalanand Mani (cf. Hindustan Times 2016c), environmentalist M K Prasad, calling it "a suicidal project" (Hindustan Times 2016c), "India's water man" Rajendra Singh, (Deogharia 2016), a well known environmental activist and winner of the Stockholm Water Prize, Shripad Dharmadhikary, "director of Madhya Pradesh non-profit working on water rights" (Chakravartty 2011), V Rajamani, former Jawaharlal Nehru University professor (cf. The Times of India 2014f), and the Odisha unit of the Indian Peasant Union All-India Kisan Mazdoor Sabha (AIKMS), which is associated with the Communist Party of India (CPI) (cf. The Hindu 2016).

On the other side, the proponents appearing in the media coverage are mainly politicians or linked to political institutions in the country. In 2003 it is for example Radha Singh, director-general of the NWDA, who is quoted with regard to the critics: "We are as aware of the implications as others. Why don't they participate in the debate? Why write off the idea without applying the mind?" (Aiya 2003). More than a decade later Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar responds to the critique: "We will do the interlinking of rivers in a manner that it simultaneously takes care of drinking-water, irrigation needs of people and ecological concerns" (Mohan 2014a). The ecological concerns raised – at least in the rhetoric – seem to be taken serious and an engagement of NRLP critical actors in the debate is asked for.

A rather different approach is found in many of the other examples in which proponents address environmental concerns through media channels. Mostly a strategy of diminishing the critics and the concerns they raise, is used by those quoted in the magazines and newspapers. One example is a 2004 article by Roul published in *Down to Earth* in which the author discusses the dispute between NRLP pro- and opponents with regard to environmental concerns:

The pro-ilor lobby [s] – mainly civil engineers from the Indian Water Resources Society and the Indian Institute of Engineers [...] – favourite ploy today is raising aspersions on the expertise of environmental non-governmental organisations that oppose them. [...] According to them, such "non-professional groups" have produced no scientific data or empirical data to demonstrate the pertinence of concepts such as rainwater harvesting and watershed management vis-à-vis ill. Such indiscriminate attack was in fact initiated by the National Water Development Agency by tossing up insinuations such as "pseudo-environmentalists," "self-claimed experts" "dolphin lovers," and so on. Of course, such slander mongerers conveniently forget that ilor's critics include experts such as Bharat Singh – distinguished engineer and former vice-chancellor, Roorkee University – and former Union Water Secretary, Ramaswamy R Iyer. In fact, according to Iyer, those questioning river linking include an engineering doyen, a present member of the Planning Commission and two of his successors as Union Water Secretary (Roul 2004).

The use of derogatory terms shows that environmental issues are not taken seriously and that a strategy of degrading opponents and disqualifying them from taking part in the discourse on the NRLP is employed.

Since Uma Bharti's accession to office as Cabinet Minister for Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation in the union government in 2014, she plays an important role in the newspaper coverage on the NRLP. She also addresses the critique concerning the environmental impact of the NRLP. Bharti assured environmentalists that environmental concerns will be considered in the implementation of the projects and refers to a "mantra of "zero effect" on environment" supposedly employed by Modi. Furthermore, she highlights a

nation-building component by pointing out that the NRLP "would be a milestone in the development of the nation" and is quoted saying that the "success of this project will prove that environment and development can go together" (Mohan 2014b). The rhetoric she uses sounds promising. A "mantra of zero effect on environment" and proving that environment and development can go together are however promises that seem hard to realize when considering the impact of the NRLP as assessed so far. In an article published by *India Today* Bharti is quoted saying "We would proceed with the project only if the river ecology remains sacrosanct and the states agree to it" (Vashishtha 2014), thereby relating to the issue of disputes among the federal stated on water sharing and project participation. Menon in *The Hindu* further reports that Bharti "appealed to environment lovers to examine the issue in totality and bring objections to the ministry. It cannot be a fundamentalist approach against river linking, she added" (Menon 2015). The use of the term "environment lovers" once again discredits the opponents. Their concerns are not accepted as valid concerns and are not taken seriously, but they are rather looked down upon, similarly as the remarks previously discussed when critics were named "pseudo-environmentalists", "self-claimed experts", and "dolphin lovers". The contributions to the debate are not welcomed but degraded.

Another politician appearing in the newspaper coverage is Urban Development and Information and Broadcasting Minister M. Venkaiah Naidu who takes the same line as Bharti:

"Some of our environmental friends are raising voices. There will be voices in democracy, let there be. [...] We have to take up river linking on a priority basis come what may" [...] He said an atmosphere needs to be created in the country so that river inter-linking becomes a people's movement (The Hindu 2015a).



The way "environmental friends" is used and subsequently it is added "there will be voices in democracy, let there be", once more speaks for a non acceptance and down playing of the concerns raised. Naidu expresses that he is not going to hear these voices, but rather advises to ignore the people and organizations and their stance on the NRLP.

In summary it can be said that two strategies seem to be employed by NRLP proponents with regard to their dealing with environmental concerns, as portrayed in the discussed articles. The first one, though appearing to a smaller extend, is one of addressing the issue and taking the concerns seriously, whereas the second is based upon degrading the opponents and the concerns they raise. Furthermore phrasings such as a "mantra of zero effect on environment", "milestone in the development of the nation", "a prove that environment and development can go together", and "a river ecology that remains sacrosanct" are used to convince the audience that the concerns raised by the critics are negligible. The following section will now take into account the media reporting on the inter-state disputes linked to the NRLP.

### **2.1.3. Inter-State Disputes**

As already pointed out in the introduction, inter-state disputes are manifold when it comes to the sharing of water between states within the federal Indian system, which makes water management a key responsibility of the federal states. Before entering the discussion of the newspaper and magazine reporting on the issue, some background information on the framework in which the disputes are set, will be pointed to.

Existing literature on inter-state water conflicts in India identifies the multiple,

often overlapping, layers of governance in water management, that are "embedded in a formal constitutional framework of federalism" (N. Singh 2011, 2). Institutions at the local level include the traditional *panchayats*<sup>10</sup>. At the state-level there are state water departments to be found, whereas at the national level institutions such as the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation (MoWR) are at work (cf. N. Singh 2011). In the constitution of India water is set on the State List<sup>11</sup>, thereby making its management a task of the federal states. Yet a shift to the Concurrent List is under debate. However the constitution already under the current status quo states that in case of inter-state rivers and river valleys the central government can take control and act in the public interest (cf. Iyer 1994, 192). The central government could therefore play an important role in negotiating river disputes, but as Singh point out its "past role has often been little more than a referee or mediator in inter-state disputes as they have arisen" (N. Singh 2011, 2). Research in the field largely agrees that in India

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10 The Panchayati Raj is a system of decentralized, local rule in India, allowing for a self-government of the villages. The Sarpanch is its elected head and together with the other elected members (panchas) constitutes the Gram Panchayat.

11 In Indian law there is a threefold structure with regard to the responsibility of federal states or the central government. Certain matters (i.e. defence, railway) fall under the *Union List*, meaning that only the central government has the right to pass laws on these issues. Other matters (i.e. public health, police, libraries & museums and water management) fall under the *State List*, viz. only the federal states are allowed to pass laws on these matters. Yet there are certain items that fall under the *Concurrent List*, including for example education. On these matters both the federal states' assemblies as well as the central government are competent to make law. Yet if conflict in the law made by federal states and the central government arise, it is the central government's law that will be supreme. Until now water is on the State List, which leaves water management to the federal states. A shift to the Concurrent List, or even to the Union List, is highly debated, as the centre could implement water projects without the states' consent. Yet, as discussed above, already now mechanisms exist that would allow for a greater involvement of the centre in water sharing disputes, however the centre refrains from doing so.

the management of water disputes is insufficient and calls for better mechanisms (cf. Iyer 1994; R. B. Shah 1994; Maitra 2007; N. Singh 2011). Shah identifies several types of inter-state water conflicts including disputes on:

- (a) equitable allocation of waters of a river basin among co-basin States [...]
- (b) problems of submergence in an upper state due to construction of a dam of a particular height in a lower state [...]
- (c) riparian rights of a lower state, vis-&-vis subsequent developments and utilization in an upper co-basin state [...]
- (d) inequitable operation of common facilities at control points [...]
- (e) sharing of benefits by different states in a specific project (R. B. Shah 1994, 177).

The NRLP reflects all types of disputes listed above. The first dispute that the following section will focus upon is the one of water sharing between India and the neighbouring countries, especially Bangladesh. Subsequent to that, the media coverage on inter-state disputes arising *within* India will be analysed.

In the early 2000s reporting on the NRLP often pointed to the effects on neighbouring Bangladesh. *Down to Earth* in 2002 for example pointed to the international implications of the project asking whether the NRLP is in line with the 1996 India-Bangladesh treaty on the sharing of Ganga waters (Down to Earth 2002). A year later, Kumar in *Down to Earth* also points to the effects of the project on neighbouring states, especially Nepal and Bangladesh. He refers to Bangladesh's apprehension towards the project as of possible social and environmental implications. The article further informs that Bangladesh's water resource minister Hafizuddin Ahmed at the time had not yet been informed on the project by the Indian government. He further announced that his state would protest the NRLP in New Delhi and that he would call on investors not to provide the monetary resource for it (A. Kumar 2003). Yet Kumar concludes that the fears

are ungrounded, as the project will influence the water flow to Bangladesh in only a very limited way. Rather he considers it an opportunity for the whole region:

What is required is international initiative, regional cooperation and the implementation of sustainable development strategies in the days to come. If the river linking project in India is implemented properly – keeping in view environmental and sociological concerns – it can benefit the entire region. A decision on this project should be taken on merit and not on the basis of the adversarial politics which unfortunately plagues this region (A. Kumar 2003).

A few months later, the reporting on the water sharing dispute in the light of the NRLP continues to focus on a possibly conflictual situation with Bangladesh when *Down to Earth* once more quotes Bangladeshi Water Resources Minister Ahmed saying "India's plan to link major rivers will lead to desertification in Bangladesh, and is a big issue for us" (Down to Earth 2003b). He is again quoted one month later referring to 20 million Bangladeshis that could be affected by the NRLP, warning of drastic reductions of water flows to his country. He uses the word "crisis" to describe the possible situation for Bangladesh if the river flows to his country were to be obstructed (cf. Down to Earth 2003c). In 2004 *Down to Earth* also reports that Bangladesh issued a demand to the Asian Development Bank "to stop loans for the Indian river-linking projects till transboundary disputes are settled" (Down to Earth 2004). Another article published in the same magazine debated the issue back in March 2004 (cf. Pankaj Singh and Singh 2004). Since then, there have only been three more articles addressing the possibly conflictual situation with Bangladesh, such as one published in *Hindustan Times* in 2005 in which India's then Water Resources Minister Priyaranjan Das Munshi tries to appease Bangladesh's protest by pointing out that no scheme would be implemented before consultation with the neighbours. He

further refers to a "disinformation campaign" regarding the NRLP that the neighbouring country should not succumbed to (cf. Hindustan Times 2005a).

After 2005 the topic disappeared from newspaper coverage and only re-emerged in 2014 with D'Monte in *Hindustan Times* asking with regard to the NRLP: "When the Farakka barrage has proved such a contentious issue with Bangladesh, how will it countenance any diversion of the Ganga and Brahmaputra in summer?" (D'Monte 2014). Also *The Times of India* raised the issue by referring to engineering consultant R C Mahulkar: "Giving an overview on linking the rivers in the country, Mahulkar also talked about the challenges related to the project. Many of the neighbouring countries including Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh have expressed their reservations about the project, he said" (The Times of India 2014b).

To a much larger extend than the issue on possible conflicts with neighbouring states, it is water disputes arising from the NRLP within India that are covered in the analysed data. In 2014 it is for example D'Monte in *Hindustan Times* that asks: "When Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have stopped just short of violence over sharing Cauvery waters, is it likely that so many states will agree to share this most precious of all resources?" (D'Monte 2014). He therein relates to the ongoing conflict between the two Southern states in sharing the water of the river Cauvery (Kaveri), in which upstream Karnataka refuses to release water to downstream Tamil Nadu – both states being in need of the water resources. The conflict is a conflict of the category (c) ("riparian rights of a lower state, vis-&-vis subsequent developments and utilization in an upper co-basin state" (R. B. Shah 1994, 177)) as in relation to Shah's classification of water disputes above and has been ongoing since 1892, when the princely states of Madras and Mysore signed an agreement on the sharing of river water. In the latest developments the Supreme Court of India has ordered Karnataka to release water to downstream Tamil Nadu,

resulting in violence and vandalism in both states (cf. Times Now 2017).

Next to the dispute with Karnataka on the Cauvery water sharing, Tamil Nadu is also involved in the discussion of the Pamba-Achankovil-Vaippar link, which is a proposed link under the NRLP scheme and would transfer water from Kerala to Tamil Nadu. Kerala however strongly objects it. In 2003 Ramakrishna in an article published by *The Hindu* pointed out:

Water experts in the Central Government express their helplessness in coming to the rescue of States such as Tamil Nadu in inter-State river disputes and inter-basin transfer. Water being a State subject, the space for the Centre is limited. With the latest amendment to the Inter-State Water Disputes Act, the Centre has to establish a disputes resolution tribunal within a year of receipt of such a request from any State. "Beyond this, we cannot do much," says a senior official, dealing with issues concerning an inter-State river. Many water experts in Tamil Nadu are of the view that the Centre has not been pro-active in ensuring effective functioning of the Cauvery River Authority (CRA) or in answering objections regarding the Pamba-Achankovil-Vaippar link despite the link proposal being mooted by a Central body, the National Water Development Agency (Ramakrishnan 2003).

In the media coverage, Kerala, refusing to give consent to the Pamba-Achankovil-Vaippar link, is a prominent example of a state's resistance to the NRLP scheme. The major reasons for Kerala's disapproval of the proposed links as mentioned in *Hindustan Times* in 2006 include the considerable power requirements for lifting the water as foreseen in the proposal, the possible negative effects on irrigation and power availability in the state as well as the non-alignment with existing water sharing agreements (cf. Hindustan Times 2006c). Kerala's politicians in

their discontent with the project often refer to Kerala's greenery being under threat if significant amounts of water will be distributed to Tamil Nadu. Lok Sabha Member of Parliament (MP) NK Premachandra in a 2014 *The Times of India* article refers to the slogan used by Kerala's tourism industry, describing the state as "God's own country". He is quoted: "The state is God's own country only because of 41 rivers which are flowing to the Arabian sea" (The Times of India 2014c), which he fears will be disturbed if water is transferred to other basins. He further refers to the state's right to object the project, as the NRLP can only be implemented if the states involved consent to it.

Kerala's discontent with the project is reoccurring in the media coverage as an example of a state refusing to consent to the NRLP. Just as Kerala's politicians point out, it is also Uma Bharti who makes clear that projects will only be implemented with the states' agreement, "those opposed would be left out" (India Today 2016b). In the article Bharti also refers to Modi's stand on the issue which is also one indicating that no state can be forced to join the NRLP.

Not only in the case of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, but also between other states conflicts persist. How to achieve consent is therefore an issue that the government seems to be continuously reflecting upon and that has been discussed in the media throughout the last years. Already in 2003 the government discussed on how the approval by all the states could be reached. At the time, Parsai reported in *The Hindu*:

Following the objections raised by Kerala on the "20-year-old" feasibility study on the Pamba-Achankovil-Vaippar link with Tamil Nadu, the Task Force has decided to "strengthen" the NWDA and other agencies and update NWDA studies and put them on the "fast-track". The Task Force has its task laid out by the Government in that

it has to come up with its first Action Plan by April. Mr. Prabhu is entrusted with the job of working out a mechanism for consensus among States on the project. He informed the Task Force of the meetings he has had in the last two months with some Chief Ministers, leaders of political parties, Union Ministers and members of the civil society. According to him, "a positive mindset was discernible in all these interchanges". Recognising that a consensus was needed among co-basin States for assistance in preparation of DPRs [Detailed Project Reports] and implementation of possible links, the present mechanism would be reinforced through formal and informal meetings with Chief Ministers (Parsai 2003).

The issue of water being on the State List and thereby falling under the federal states' administration and the implications of that provision for the NRLP was also pointed out by Aiya in *India Today* in 2003: "Unless the Centre amends the Constitution making it [water, author's note] a national resource, it cannot force the states to agree" (Aiya 2003). Also in 2005 the Union government tried to achieve consent among India's states on the topic of river interlinking (cf. Down to Earth 2005). In 2006 a press release by the Water Ministry read that the then Union Minister for Water Resources, Prof. Saifuddin Soz, also stressed the necessity of achieving a consensus on water sharing and further pointed out that "It should be our endeavour to implement such projects/schemes expeditiously, which makes this gift of nature available to all in the country" (Hindustan Times 2006b). In 2008 *Hindustan Times* once more pointed out how the government stresses the individual decision-making power on the issue by the states whilst trying to achieve consensus (cf. Hindustan Times 2008).

Similarly, five years later in 2013 Seth in *Down to Earth* reports:



It is hardly a state secret that the water engineering community in India wants to expedite the Interlinking of Rivers (ILR) project. To move on the issue, the Union Ministry of Water Resources last month uploaded on its website draft policy guidelines for sharing of water amongst states, with the altruistic objective of "developing the waters of inter-state rivers for the betterment of the population of the co-basin states/union territories such that developments are not detrimental to the interests of one another and are guided by national perspective". A few pages into the document make it clear that the draft is geared to create policy influence; states are encouraged to import from one area to another, and also export to deficit basins outside state territories (Seth 2013).

As seen from the discussed articles, the media reports on the implications of federal water management responsibilities and its consequences extensively. Help in solving the issue is also offered from outside of the country, as Jha reports in 2015. In an article non-resident Indians living in the United States of America are quoted who "offered their contribution – both financial and technical expertise – in the ambitious river-linking project, which aims at providing lasting solution to India's water woes" (L. K. Jha 2015). The article refers on that matter to "Houston-based Socalingam 'Sam' Kannappan, who has been organizing the NRIs on this issue after the project was announced by the previous Vajpayee government in 2002". He is cited saying that "the NRIs [Non-resident Indians] would help in buying interest free bond if raised by Government of India for the purpose" (L. K. Jha 2015). In a letter he further added that the community "will help in rock drilling, drip irrigation, pipelines etc. and evaluate Texas Mexico model for resolving conflicts between neighbouring nations" (L. K. Jha 2015). If any cooperation with the Indian government resulted from this is however unknown to me.

A very comprehensive article by Chakravartt published in *Down to Earth* in 2012 includes an information box titled "Projects in Limbo", and informs on NRLP projects on the hold, because of the objections raised by one of the federal states' concerned. It points for example to Karnataka's reservations concerning the Bedti-Varada and Netravati-Hemavati-Tapi links, and Rajasthan's refusal to agree to the Parbati-Kalisindh-Chambal link. On the case of Kerala it points out that the state refuses to consent as the project would interfere with its existing channel network, its availability of water for irrigation and drinking purposes and as it would worsen the situations of water scarcity already experienced in summer and off-monsoon months (cf. Chakravartt 2012). Chakravartt further reports: "There are eight interlinking projects which are under review by different state authorities. However, the details of the divergence of opinion between the states are not clearly spelt out" (Chakravartt 2012). In 2016 *The Hindu* quoted "a top official in the Water Resource Ministry" who also points out that the government is aware of the limitations of the NRLP scheme due to some federal states' apprehensions. The unnamed informant is quoted saying that "not all [of the projects under the scheme, note by the author] may be realised due to interstate disputes. Interlinks within states are more feasible" (The Hindu 2016i).

As seen from all the articles referred to above, inter-state water sharing is an ongoing discussion. In 2016 it found its expression in a debate staged by Sengupta in *Down to Earth* titled "Should water be brought under Centre's control to settle inter-state disputes?" (cf. Sengupta 2016). "India's top water policy experts" were asked to voice their opinions. The debate was initiated after a comment by member of Parliament Sharad Yavav stating that water "should be brought under the Central List otherwise our country will be ruined", followed by Water Minister Uma Bharti's answer "I agree, but was afraid that it would provoke a controversy. We will start proceedings in that direction". Several arguments for and against a nationalization were presented in the debate.

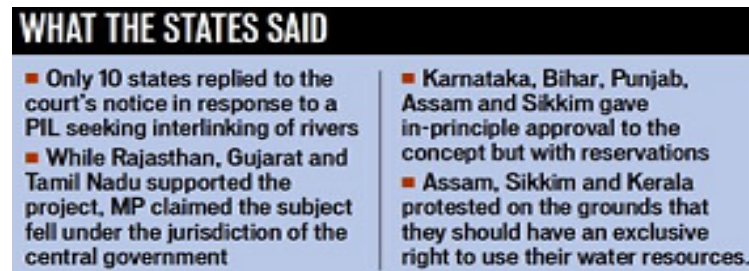
In the context of the inter-state disputes within the NRLP scheme, the reporting also refers to the Supreme Court judgement on the NRLP from 2012, which called on the states to participate in the scheme. One example of that reporting is Seth in *Down to Earth* in 2012:

In its final judgement dated February 27, 2012, a three-member bench, headed by the chief justice of India, expressed the "pious hope of speedy implementation" to bring the project to a success. [...] The apex court has stated that "a greater element of mutuality and consensus needs to be built between the States and the Centre on the one hand, and the States inter-se on the other" (Seth 2012).

Sinha in *Hindustan Times* also reported on the judgement:

The Supreme Court on Monday gave the green signal to the much-awaited interlinking of rivers project and directed the Centre and all states to "contribute their bit" to save people living in drought-prone zones from hunger and also those facing destruction of their homes caused by floods. Disposing a decade-old PIL [Public Interest Litigation], a bench headed by chief justice SH Kapadia directed the ministry of water resources to constitute a high-powered committee to plan, construct and implement the programme "for the benefit of the nation as a whole" (Sinha 2012).

The article further included an information box pictured below, informing about the state's responses:



*Figure 11: Information Box published in Hindustan Times (Sinha 2012).*

As seen above, the conflicts on water sharing between India and its neighbouring countries as well as between federal states within India, are manifold. The reporting picks up on these issues, yet restrains from taking sides on the issue. However, it becomes clear that it is major hurdle for the government to be solved if all the links envisaged by the NRLP were to be implemented. It is therefore not surprising that the debate on a possible nationalization of water resources time and again picks up. Yet so far, no policy move in this direction has been taken. The next subchapter will be dedicated to a different topic arising in the analysed data on the NRLP. It will consider in how far arguments of irrigation and agricultural benefits play in role in legitimizing the project and how they appear in the analysed newspapers and magazines.

#### **2.1.4. Irrigation & Agriculture Narratives**

The NRLP's main goal, as stated by the government, is to provide sufficient water for irrigation purposes and thereby offering the possibility of producing sufficient agricultural output, which is considered to be of major importance especially in light of the steady population growth. The arguments put forward by the NRLP's proponents can for example be found in a 2003 article by Kumar published in

*Down to Earth* reporting that the government proposes the project in order to satisfy India's increasing water needs whilst correcting asymmetric water distribution in the country, as well as augmenting irrigation potential and thereby food production. The author furthermore refers to a number of 1,35,000 square miles of farmland that could be irrigated with the water made accessible through implementation of the NRLP (cf. A. Kumar 2003). In 2011 the numbers on irrigation benefits by the NRLP as mentioned in *Down to Earth* are "160 million hectares for all types of crops by 2050, compared with a maximum of about 140 million hectares that could be generated through conventional sources of irrigation" (Chakravartty 2011). Koshy and Bansal in a 2016 article also point out that "the scheme [...] envisions an area more than twice the size of Andhra Pradesh receiving additional water for irrigation" (Koshy and Bansal 2016). The irrigation promises made by the NRLP scheme are high, and it's role in legitimizing the project central to the debate.

Proponents of the project therefore often use the narrative of increased agricultural production in advocating the project. One example is NWDA director S. Masood Hussain who points to the irrigation benefits of the project, in relation to the growing needs as the population increases. In an article by Jolly published in *India Today* in 2016 he is cited with numbers of 35 million hectares of farmland that can be irrigated, which until now are monsoon-dependent. He sees in the NRLP "the only realistic means to raise the country's irrigation potential from 140 million to 175 million hectares by 2050, when the population is projected to touch 1.6 billion" (Jolly 2016).

Aiya in a comprehensive report, already referred to previously, from 2003, established the connection of future irrigation needs resulting from an increased need of food production for a fast growing population. He reports:

With the country's population estimated to touch 1,650 million by 2050, India would need to double its food production to 450 million tonnes even as the demand for water rises from 634 bcm [billion cubic metres] to 1,447 bcm. [...] If India wants its economy to grow at over 8 per cent, agriculture has to be boosted. And water, second on American psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, is the key (Aiya 2003).

Interestingly, this article also directly refers to the economic interests in increased irrigation and thereby increased food production. It is also Water Minister Uma Bharti in an interview with *Down to Earth* magazine who in relation to the NRLP points out that "the country needs such projects as the country's GDP is agro-based" (Down to Earth 2016). In another article, Bharti does not directly relate to economic aspects, however continues to advert that "when the river-linking project is implemented, 35,000 hectares of land could be irrigated" (The Times of India 2016c). Also in an *India Today* article Bharti is cited on the issue of food production. She points out that the NRLP is "'very important' for enhancing [the] country's water and food security" (India Today 2016d).

Another politician appearing in the debate is Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways and Shipping Nitin Gadkari who, in a speech reported on in *The Hindu*, in which he also refers to research and innovation being "not only vital to development and progress but [to] the very future of the country" and to "the goal of making India the number one country in the world", referred to the NRLP's necessity "to boost irrigation for agricultural purposes, which would boost India's agricultural production" (The Hindu 2016q). Also former President APJ Abdul Kalam highlights the implications of the NRLP for the agricultural production: "Interlinking of rivers is the solution for water scarcity and it will help improve agriculture across the country" (The Times of India 2014c).

Opponents on the other side question the agriculture narrative used in the legitimization strategy of the proponents. An article published in *Down to Earth* in 2004 already gives away the authors' opinion on the NRLP by the title "A Tughlakian folly", referring to Muhammad bin Tughluq, Sultan of Delhi in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, who became known for introducing ambitious schemes which most often were utter failures with severe consequences. One example of these is the shifting of the capital from Delhi to a more centrally located position in Daulatabad in today's Maharashtra which led to a less protected border in the North-West, enabling the 1328/29 Mongolian invasion. The 1971 Tamil movie Mohammed-Bin-Tughlaq, a political satire, also refers to the theme of failed ambitious political schemes. In the article, P. Singh and Singh indicate:

Enhancing irrigation facilities is another tall claim of the project. This is again misplaced. Our concerns about food security and sustained economic growth can be taken care of, without spending huge sums of money for transferring water from Bengal to Rajasthan or Kerala to Tamil Nadu, by improving the efficiency of our irrigation systems. Moreover, the government also needs to redefine the need-availability paradigm by redesigning and restructuring irrigation demands. Growing water-intensive paddy or sugarcane can never be a right of any peasant (Pankaj Singh and Singh 2004).

They thereby question the proponent's perspective of the necessity of the NRLP and rather propose to thoroughly analyse the existing irrigation management. In a book review published in *Down to Earth* D'Souza further points out:

In the course of this manual replumbing of the Indian sub-continent's hydrology, the project, it is claimed, could eternally banish drought,

cure floods, irrigate about 150 million hectares and also generate about 30,000 mega watts of hydel power. The interlinking rivers project [...] attempts to revive the long discarded notion that wherever Nature is "incompetent" in its distribution of resources, engineering ingenuity and political will can recreate more efficient outcomes. The simple can be elegant, but at times it can also be banal and downright absurd (D'Souza 2004).

D'Souza in this quote eloquently dismisses the narrative used by the proponents and offers a comprehensive critique to the NRLP's ideological foundations.

To sum up, the articles discussed have shown that politicians such as Uma Bharti, APJ Abdul Kalam and Nitin Gadkari use the narrative of a need of an increased irrigation potential and agricultural production, as a strong argument in favour of the NRLP. Further added are economic considerations as well as the increased needs of a growing population. Opponents on the other side, as especially visible in P. Singh's and Singh's article, criticise the narrative and rather question whether it would not be more suitable to redefine the need-availability paradigm and to improve current irrigation management. Next to the articles discussed, there are numerous other articles addressing the issue of agricultural benefits, however they mostly do so by mentioning the issue amongst other proposed benefits. As compared for example to the debate on environmental concerns, the issue of agriculture is less intensely debated in the media analysed and provokes less opposing opinions. If this also applies to the issue of social costs, will be analysed in the following section.

#### **2.1.5. Discourse on Social Costs**

"Massive human displacement" (Down to Earth 2002), "displacing communities



and lifestyles" (A. Kumar 2003), "the ecological, economic and social costs of interlinking rivers are going to be enormous" (Sharma 2012b) – these examples show that a lot of reporting does take a very critical stance towards the social costs of the NRLP. The reporting also shows how little is known about the actual scope of the consequences, and especially how little is known about the number of people that will be subject to displacement: "millions of people" (Hindustan Times 2016c) "about four and a half lakh people – most of them tribal and from backward sections" (Pankaj Singh and Singh 2004), "more than five lakh people" (Parsai 2004), "millions of people" (Nandi 2015), "nearly 1.5 million people" (Koshy and Bansal 2016), and "half a million people" (Dasgupta 2016), are among the numbers mentioned. Between 450,000 (which seems unlikely, as research has already estimated the resettlement for the Polavaram Project to be at 400,000), and several millions is a large gap, however no matter which number taken, they indicate that the NRLP scheme will include massive displacement.

In the reporting, it is repeatedly pointed out that resettlement in India is not known to be done in a satisfying way for the parties involved. For example in 2012 Narain in *Down to Earth* magazine pointed out: "The government's track record in resettling people displaced by such projects is abysmal" (Narain 2012). Similarly Dasgupta in *Hindustan Times* expresses: "Half a million people are likely to be displaced in the process, and knowing India's record of tackling displacement, it is definitely not a happy thought" (Dasgupta 2016).

Most articles however refer to the social consequences only very briefly and only name them among other issues that critics point out (Down to Earth 2002; A. Kumar 2003; D'Souza 2004; Jolly 2016; Sharma 2012b; Praveen 2015). Yet there are a few exceptions such as the following lead article by Binoy which was published in the opinion section of *The Hindu* in August 2014. She writes:

For some, drowning a few tigers here and there does not seem much of a price to pay for more water and more electricity, but what of the communities who depend on these lands for their livelihoods? Of course there is that old logic that people must be displaced for the greater good of the country, but would the lives of these people get magically transformed for the better after they have been resettled? Perhaps the question to ask then is whose thirst for water will be quenched by this process. Or, must the more vulnerable sections of the Indian population subsidise the rich and powerful once again? [...] The interlinking project offers us an expansive view of how "development", ambitiously championed by the Narendra Modi government, can be ecologically and socially disastrous. For, at the heart of the project lies a technocratic fantasy of ending water scarcity through the power of hydraulic engineering. [...] Is the crisis of water scarcity and livelihood in contemporary India about to be solved for landless farmers, tribal communities and seasonal labourers or is it only going to benefit the consumptive desires of elite and middle class families? (Binoy 2014).

She renders visible how the underlying power hierarchies function and challenges a political discourse of displacing people for the greater good of the country, which for example Nehru employed in his often quoted<sup>12</sup> speech addressing the people that were to be displaced by the Hirakud Dam ("If you are to suffer, you should suffer in the interest of the country"). As we have already seen in the section on the environmental costs, her article poses the question of to who's benefit the projects is constructed and who is excluded from it.

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12 cf. i.e. India Water Portal 2013; Roy 1999, 1

There are a few further occurrences of a more detailed reporting on the social costs. One example is P. Singh's and Singh's article published in *Down to Earth*, in which they write:

Let us now examine the human costs of river linking. The project involves construction of canals, running into thousands of kilometres, and some 200 storage dams. About four and a half lakh people – most of them tribal and from backward sections – would be displaced as a result of such construction; nearly 79,000 hectares of forestland will be submerged. It is a fundamental principle of international law that human beings cannot be sacrificed at the altar of economic growth. The International Labour Organization Convention 107, which has been ratified by India, recognises the rights of indigenous and other tribal and semi-tribal over lands they traditionally occupy. Moreover, Article 51 of the Indian Constitution enjoins the state to protect interests of tribals and the backward sections. But given India's woeful record of rehabilitating people affected by 'development' projects, it is very unlikely that people displaced by the interlinking project will get justice (Pankaj Singh and Singh 2004).

Similarly as previously discussed articles, the authors point to a great lack of trust in the government in conducting fair and just rehabilitation measures. They question in how far this project will bring a positive development, especially with regard to the communities affected, who might be "sacrificed at the altar of economic growth". Both articles quoted above present a critical reflection on the issue. As in the case of environmental concerns, it is also on social consequences that experts' quotes are used in the reporting. The opponents quoted however relate to the issue of social costs only as an issue among others, resulting in a large overlap of actors to those already discussed in the previous subchapter. The only

proponent quoted on the issue of social costs is Uma Bharti.

Among the quoted critics is Dharmadhikary, director of a Madhya Pradesh NGO, who is cited describing the so far conducted social and environmental impact assessments as "shoddy" (Chakravartty 2011). It is also once again Indian River Valley Network Convenor Kumar Kalanand Mani who is quoted: "The project will establish the hegemony of global investors in deciding the life of common people and ultimately bring economic slavery" (Hindustan Times 2016c). He further describes it as "anti-people and anti-environment" (Hindustan Times 2016c). Himanshu Thakkar is also quoted mentioning the social costs of the project (cf. Uttam 2015; Koshy and Bansal 2016), so is Rajendra Singh (cf. Ganguly 2015).

The reaction of the proponents in the media coverage is a restrained one and there is not much material on it within the collected data. As mentioned above, Uma Bharti is the only proponent reacting to the issue of social costs: "Asked about displacement of people that the rivers linking project will bring, Ms. Bharti said not a single person would be removed if he/she was not convinced about a better life and four-times the compensation" (Parsai 2015). Mohan in a *The Times of India* article also addresses Uma Bharti's reaction on the issue. She downplays the concerns, saying that there are only about "certain things". Once sorted out, "there will be no opposition to it at all" (Mohan 2015). Furthermore, an interviewer conducting an interview with Uma Bharti published in *India Today* asked her about the project-affected people (PAP). Her answer was:

Don't look at the PAP, look at the benefits of this project. We need to focus on giving them a better life. [...] We want to create a milk revolution on both sides of the rivers through animal husbandry projects which don't need lots of land. Even 1 acre will be sufficient

(per person). Project-affected people will get priority for resettlement. I have spoken with surface transport minister Nitin Gadkari and asked him to include the 31 ILR canals in the list of 101 inland waterways he is working on. That will give us revenue. I've asked for PAPs to get the first benefits of these projects (Unnithan 2016).

The interview continues asking her "But given India's past track record in rehabilitation and compensation, shouldn't we be worried?" Bharti replied:

In the two big projects in India thus far, the Narmada project is considered the best RR [Rehabilitation & Resettlement] project. In Tehri, the rehabilitation was flawed and over one lakh people were disappointed because a bridge could not be built. The people of Pratapnagar were promised a bridge, from 6 km, they were given an 80-km bypass. In the Narmada Sarovar projects, there was politics at play. There were not many project-affected people in Gujarat, but there were in Madhya Pradesh. But the people of MP [Madhya Pradesh] were unhappy over minor issues, which I fixed in one month after becoming CM [Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh] in 2003. Digvijay Singh, as CM, was instigating environmentalists... they were playing dirty politics (Unnithan 2016).

From the quotes above, several strategies that Bharti employs in the discursive farming of the displacement issue, can be pointed to. Firstly, Bharti implies that the displaced people themselves are convinced of a betterment of their life ("not a single person would be removed if he/she was not convinced about a better life") and thereby trivialises the concerns and realities of resettlement. She downplays the consequences also by relating to previous examples of displacement ("people of MP were unhappy over minor issues, which I fixed in one month after

becoming CM"). Secondly, she pacifies the critics by expressing that the concerns are going to be addressed thus resulting in "no opposition to it at all". Thirdly, she tries to distract from the topic of displacement ("don't look at the PAP, look at the benefits of this project"). Fourthly, she argues that the displacement will be beneficial to the communities ("focus on giving them a better life", "PAPs to get the first benefits"). And lastly, she accuses others of wrongdoing and of unnecessarily overemphasising the issue of social impact ("Digvijay Singh, as CM, was instigating environmentalists... they were playing dirty politics").

In general, with regard to the social costs, it is notable, that there is a lot fewer newspaper and magazine coverage as for example in the case of environmental concerns. The topic appears mostly as a parenthesis. As the later chapter on the Polavaram Project will however show, this might be due to the fact that the displacement for most of the NRLP projects is yet little concrete. Already the above mentioned numbers of people affected by the project indicate that there is a huge knowledge gap, which arises also due to the fact that firstly not for all the links the detailed project reports have been submitted and secondly that in cases of the existing projects reports the numbers presented by the government are doubted. In the later discussed case of the Polavaram Project it becomes however visible that when acute displacement is due, the topic does attract more attention in the magazines and newspapers.

#### **2.1.6. Political Narratives**

The sections above rendered visible how the political figures interwoven with the NRLP use their influence on discursively shaping the perception of the project. In the following part, this issue will be further investigated. To do so, the following part will present the politicians involved and their framing of the project within the media.

Looking at the appearance of political figures, Prime Minister Modi is mentioned in 37 documents; therefore 15% of the documents collected refer to him. Former Prime Minister Vajpayee is mentioned in 19%, Uma Bharti in 18% of the documents. References to Chief Ministers appear in 19% of the articles. Vajpayee is usually mentioned as an important figure as he pushed the project and initiated the debate and implementation of the last decades. The NRLP is for example referred to as "Atal Behari Vajpayee's pet project" (The Times of India 2013b). *India Today* mentions him by pointing out: "Atalji's river linking project was a dream to solve the flood and drought crisis from the country" (India Today 2014a). Similarly his role in the venture of the NRLP is registered by Jolly's article published in *India Today* in 2016: "Avidly pushed by then PM A.B. Vajpayee, a national task force was put together amid grand proclamations" (Jolly 2016). Likewise, *India Today* in 2016 reported: "The river interlinking project is considered the brainchild of the NDA government and in October, 2002, the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had formed a task force to get the project going against the backdrop of the acute drought that year" (India Today 2016f).

The above mentioned articles exclude the prior history of the project and the involvement of other important figures such as Sir Arthur Cotton. It is Vajpayee instead who is referred to as the initiator. Repeatedly the NRLP is said to be based on him: "The idea of inter-linking of rivers took-off during the NDA govt headed by Vajpayee" (Hindustan Times 2014). Haq in an article published also in *Hindustan Times* several months later again states with regard to the NRLP: "The Modi government [...] moves swiftly on a controversial programme first mooted during the Atal Behari Vajpayee-era" (Haq 2014). The story that is thereby being told is one of a BJP project – initiated by Vajpayee as the first BJP Prime Minister, and implemented by Modi as his successor ten years later. Other actors are excluded from the historical narrative. If intended or not, the way the NRLP

project is told to be solely a BJP project is an idea that the current government would surely approve of.

However there are exceptions in the reporting as some articles include a perspective that uncovers the colonial origins of the scheme. 10 out of the 150 documents on the NRLP mention Sir Arthur Cotton as a major figure in the idea of river linking in India. This is for example the case in D'Monte's article published in *Hindustan Times* who writes that "it was under Atal Bihari Vajpayee that the NDA espoused the gargantuan national scheme" (D'Monte 2014), but who also points out that the concept of linking rivers "was first thought of by British irrigation expert Sir Arthur Cotton during the Raj" (D'Monte 2014). Also Roul in *Down to Earth* writes that "River-linking was first mooted by Arthur Cotton in the mid-nineteenth century" (Roul 2004).

Both Cotton and Vajpayee are referred to in a context of historical origin and history of the idea of the NRLP, but are not shaping today's discourse on the scheme. This differs for example from former President A. P. J. Abdul Kalam. His words are quoted for example in Mishra's article in *Down to Earth* from Kalam's Independence Day speech of 2005:

Rainfall and floods are annual features in many parts of the country. Instead of thinking on interlinking of rivers only during flood and drought, it's time we implement this programme with a great sense of urgency. We need to make an effort to overcome various hurdles in our way to the implementation of this major project. I feel it has the promise of freeing the country from the endless cycle of floods and droughts (A. Mishra 2005).

The impact of his words was a profound one, as they initiated the Supreme Court



to take on the issue of river linking. The Supreme Court Judgement on the NRLP from 2012 reads that the application is filed "based on the speech of the President on the Independence Day Eve [...] because of the paradoxical phenomenon of flood in one part of the country while some other parts face drought at the same time (Supreme Court of India 2012, 5). The judgement passed by the Supreme Court is a very pro-NRLP judgement, stirring discontent with NRLP critics (cf. Chakravartt 2012). It said:

We not only express a pious hope of speedy implementation but also do hereby issue a mandamus to the Central and the State Governments concerned to comply with the directions contained in this judgement effectively and expeditiously and without default. This is a matter of national benefit and progress. We see no reason why any State should lag behind in contributing its bit to bring the Inter-linking River Program to a success, thus saving the people living in drought-prone zones from hunger and people living in flood-prone areas from the destruction caused by floods (Supreme Court of India 2012, 62–63).

The ruling demonstrates how political figures such as Kalam significantly shape the discourse and thereby the perception of the NRLP. The media reactions to the judgement refer to the statements by the judges, as for example Sinha who reported that the Supreme Court "gave the green signal to the much-awaited interlinking of rivers project" which according to the court would be "for the benefit of the nation as a whole" (Sinha 2012). By pointing out that the project was "much-awaited" the article clearly positions itself as pro-NRLP, as surely the protesters and critics have not been waiting for the "green signal" but rather hoped for a different outcome of the judgement.

Next to the influential position of the President, it is also several Chief Ministers

who are shaping the discourse. For example in 2012 *The Times of India* published an insightful article by Jha on the laying of a foundation stone for the Narmada-Kshipra river interlinking project by then Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan. The Chief Minister's speech also refers to the NRLP scheme of which the specific project is part of. He refers to it as providing "relieve from problem of drought in case of scanty rainfall in the state", providing prosperity for the state as well as promising that the "residents' lives will undergo a positive change" (B. K. Jha 2012).

Former deputy Prime Minister L K Advani also took part in the ceremony and "lavished praise on this unique river-link project" as Jha continues to report: "He said that this day is also very important for denizens of Malwa region since their lives are set for revolutionary changes following its completion" (B. K. Jha 2012). Relieve from droughts and floods, prosperity, and positive, "revolutionary" changes in life, are the catching phrases used here to promote the idea of a NRLP. The ceremony included also the announcement of a temple that will be build at Kshipra's source. The Chief Minister is reported to have said that "this place will be developed as a pilgrimage centre and will be known as Sangam Sthal (confluence place)" (B. K. Jha 2012). An aspect of sacredness or religion that is intermingled with development projects by political stakeholders becomes visible here. The phenomenon will reappear in the context of the Polavaram Project in later parts of the dissertation. It is an aspect that also Binoy's article captures, when presenting the contradiction between supporting the NRLP and supporting Hindu Nationalist ideas. Her already in previous sections discussed article was published in *The Hindu* in 2014 and reads:

In the context of the interlinking project, one is also reminded of a comment by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan<sup>13</sup> on the significance of

13 Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was India's first Vice President and Second President as well as a scholar of philosophy and religious studies.

confluences to Hinduism. Commenting on a passage from the Mundaka Upanishad<sup>14</sup>, he notes that the meeting of rivers, and of a river with the sea, reminds the Hindu mind of the individual soul uniting with the infinite universal soul, shaking off all names and forms. But if the Upanishad points towards a sacred geography etched on the bodies of rivers that travel across our subcontinent representing an age-old, everyday relationship between the natural world and us, the interlinking projects instead present a deeply anthropocentric and commoditised view of riparian environments, and of their relevance to the Indian subcontinent. And while the interlinking projects stand in stark contrast to Hinduism's long-standing reverence for the river, it is deeply ironic that it is being heralded in by a political establishment that seeks to identify itself continuously with Hinduism (Binoy 2014).

It is a gripping point she makes here about the BJP's alleged Hinduism based politics that when considered more closely, as Binoy does, clashes to a great extent with the agenda of river interlinking. It also interesting as her observation stands out in the media reporting in its singularity of appearance. Yet as we will see later on religiously framing the water projects does play an important part in the political legitimization of this specific project – the clash she describes does not seem to be one for the politicians in power.

As it was pointed out in the beginning of the subchapter, Modi is mentioned frequently in the data collected on the reporting on the NRLP. Yet, Modi is usually not quoted directly. *The Times of India* reports for example: "During the campaigning for the recent polls, the BJP and its senior leaders including Prime

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14 The Mundaka Upanishad belongs to the Vedas, ancient Sanskrit scriptures that embody the oldest texts of Hinduism.

Minister Narendra Modi repeatedly had emphasised on the need for linking of rivers through the country and how the project can help resolve the water crisis in several areas" (The Times of India 2014a)). In a similar way *India Today* reports: "Modi also raised the issue of interlinking of rivers, saying it is crucial for the country to keep a check on floods and drought" (India Today 2014b). An exception which does quote Modi directly, is a *The Times of India* article from 2013, before Modi became Prime Minister. Speaking at the Vibrant Gujarat Global Agriculture Summit Modi mentions the NRLP as a sideline by referring to Vajpayee's initiation of the NRLP project and by mentioning Gujarat's linking of rivers with the Narmada as a positive example (cf. The Times of India 2013b). Patil in an article published in *The Hindu* also cites Modi from a speech saying that Modi "expected all the political parties to rise above all differences, including regional interests and make a common cause with the Centre to implement the ambitious river-linking project" (Patil 2016).

As the previous segments on the environment, inter-state disputes, irrigation and social issues already showed and this segment enlarged upon, politicians take on a significant role in shaping the discourse on the NRLP. Former President Kalam's Independence Day speech of 2002 is one of the examples that demonstrated the way the NRLP's implementation is legitimized and advocated for by the political sphere. In the next chapter, the dissertation will now shift towards the Ken-Betwa Project to analyse the media reporting on one of the first projects to be implemented under the NRLP scheme. In how far the reporting differs or in how far overlaps exists, will be disclosed.

## **2.2. The Ken-Betwa Project**

### **2.2.1. Introduction**

The Ken-Betwa Project is designed to connect the Ken river in Madhya Pradesh to the Betwa in Uttar Pradesh. A 220 km long link canal will be constructed, which will be mainly located in Madhya Pradesh. The canal is envisioned to transfer 1020 Mm<sup>3</sup> of water from the Ken river across the Uttar Pradesh boarder, where it ends in the already existing Barua Sagar Reservoir. From that point, the water will be transferred to the Betwa river which is about 8 km away. The confluence of the canal and the Betwa river is 13km away from the city of Jhansi, historically famous for Lakshmibai, the Rani of Jhansi, a legendary leading figure in the resistance to the British Raj<sup>15</sup>. Next to the transfer of water to the Betwa river, the project also aims at providing en-route irrigation. It is especially Madhya Pradesh that will be affected by construction measures, whereas in Uttar Pradesh, the main beneficiary of the project, the construction will take place only to a marginal extend.

Next to the canal construction the project includes several dams. The most discussed one is the 74-metre high dam at Daudhan on the river Ken which will lead to the submergence of more than 100 sq. km and will effect the Panna Tiger Reserve thereby endangering a larger tiger habitat. The reserve, declared a Tiger Reserve in 1991 with an area of 576 sq. km, is known for its successful reintroduction of tigers after there were no more tigers left in 2009 due to poaching. With today 27 tigers it titles itself as having the "most successful tiger reintroduction / re-wildering programme in the world" (Panna Tiger Reserve

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15 For the story of her life see for example: Mahāśvetā Debī, Sengupta, and Sengupta 2000.

2017). By the construction of the Daudhan Dam parts of the reserve will be submerged. The site of the dam's construction is going to be 2.5 km upstream of the already present Gangau weir. From here the canal will start to transport the water to Uttar Pradesh's Jhansi area (National Water Development Agency 2010c, 2017).

It is the aim of the project to divert so called "surplus" water from the Ken to the "deficit" Betwa basin. The notion of "surplus" and "deficit", a prime assumption in the NRLP project in general, is however highly disputed as calculations are often based on average annual water levels, not taking into considerations large differences in water levels throughout the year depending on the seasons. Providing irrigation and drinking water to the upper Betwa basin and to en-route areas of the canal are mentioned as the main benefits of the project. Furthermore facilities for hydropower generation will be installed. The NWDA further enlists the following benefits of the project:

Ground water will get supplemented due to increased use of surface water for irrigation. The scarcity of drinking water in these dry areas will be mitigated considerable. The afforestation programme could be implemented on canal banks resulting in environmental improvement. The communication system will improve because of canal roads and CD [Community Development] works raising marketing opportunities. The formation of the reservoirs will help tourism development, fish and aquaculture, bird sanctuaries etc. Besides, there will be an increase in employment opportunities during the construction of project (National Water Development Agency 2010a).

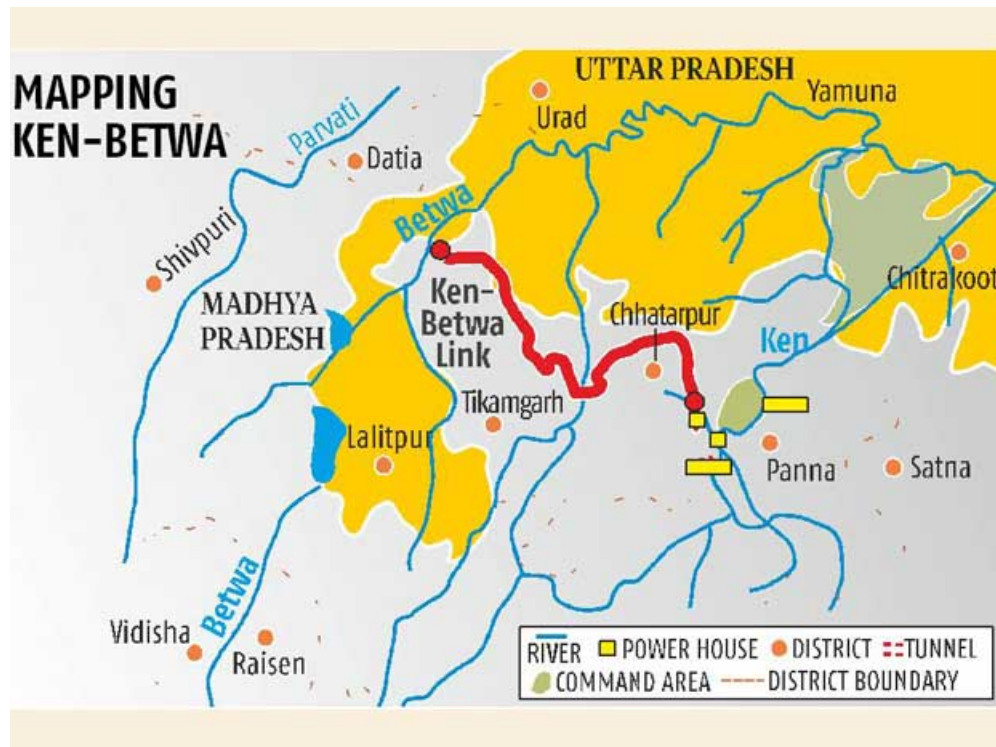


Figure 12: Map of Ken-Betwa Link (Sethi 2016).

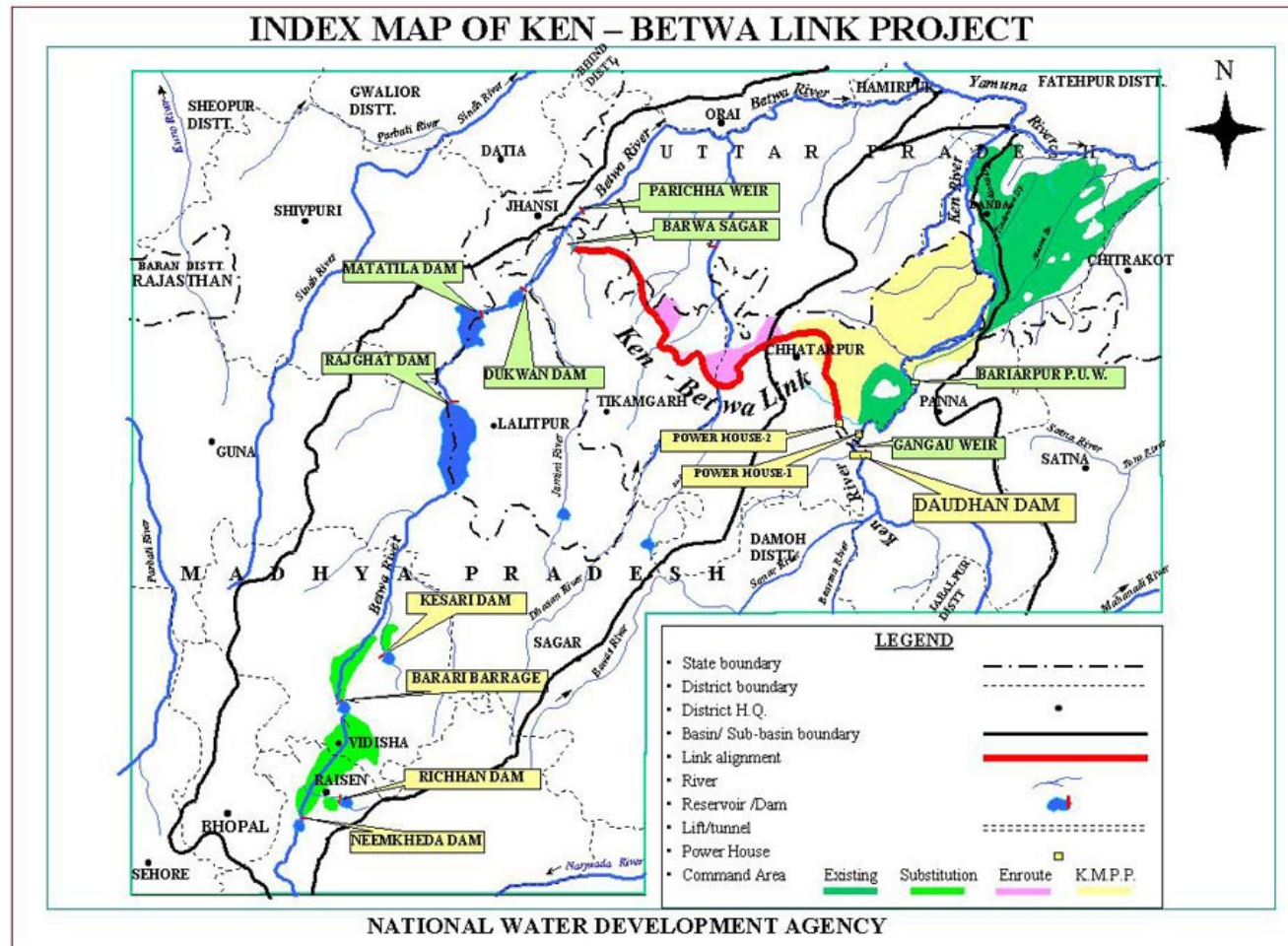


Figure 13: Map of Ken-Betwa Project (National Water Development Agency 2017).



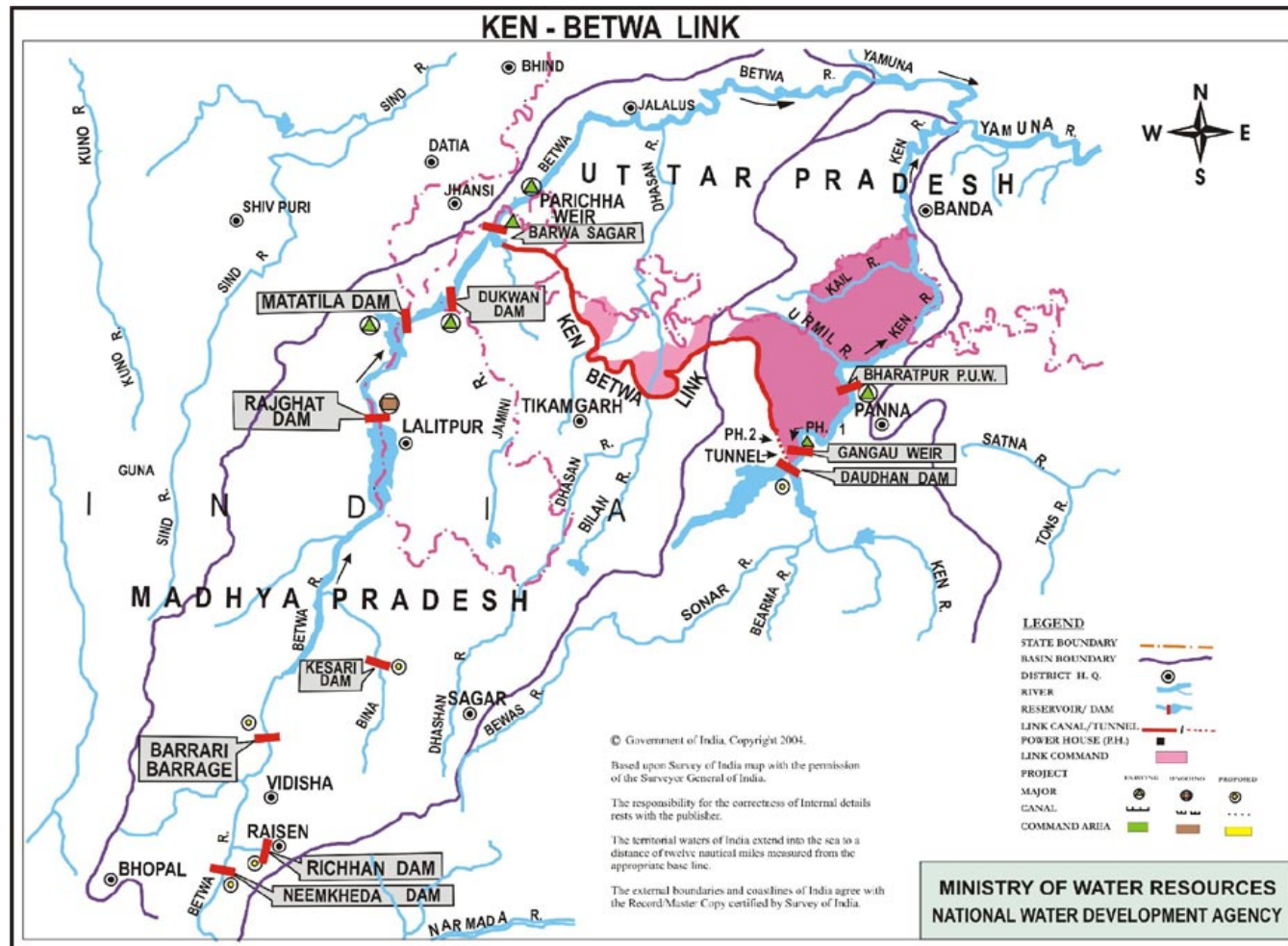


Figure 15: Map of Ken-Betwa Project (National Water Development Agency 2010c).

Critics not only question the assumption that the Ken has sufficient "surplus" water to spare but oppose the Ken-Betwa Link Project for its environmental impact, its effect on the Tiger Reserve as well as the social costs involved, including displacement. Yet, the project received Union Cabinet clearance in 2014 and – with delays – clearance of the National Board for Wildlife in 2016 (cf. Mohan 2016c). Until the time of writing this dissertation constructions had not yet started, as the project still lacks for example its final forest clearances and its wildlife clearance is still pending before the Supreme Court, where it is being challenged (cf. Vishwa 2018).

### 2.2.2. Quantitative Aspects of the Media Analysis

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Hindustan Times	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	3	10	5	23
Down to Earth	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	4	9
India Today	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	5	10	17
Times of India	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	4	13	20
The Hindu	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	7	12
Total	1	4	1	0	0	1	1	4	1	0	7	22	39	<b>81</b>

*Figure 16: Publications and numbers of articles on the Ken-Betwa Project per year*

Before commencing the qualitative analysis of the media coverage on the Ken-Betwa Project, a short insight into the quantitative aspects will be provided. The analysis includes 81 articles published in *Hindustan Times* (23), *Down to Earth* (9), *India Today* (17), *The Hindu* (12) and *The Times of India* (20) reporting on the Ken-Betwa Project.

As the table above illustrates, the articles on the Ken-Betwa Project have mainly been published in 2015 and 2016, due to the circumstance that the current government is pushing its implementation and the plans have become more

concrete. Contentwise, it is mainly the ecological and environmental concerns, including the Panna Tiger Reserve, that are debated. The issue is mentioned 83 times in the analysed articles. It is followed by the topic of irrigation and agriculture (mentioned 42 times), droughts and floods (26), social costs including displacement (26), drinking water (19), and hydropower (18). Only six times possible inter-state conflicts are mentioned. How the reporting looks at these issues, which narratives are employed and who is speaking, will be addressed in the following analysis.

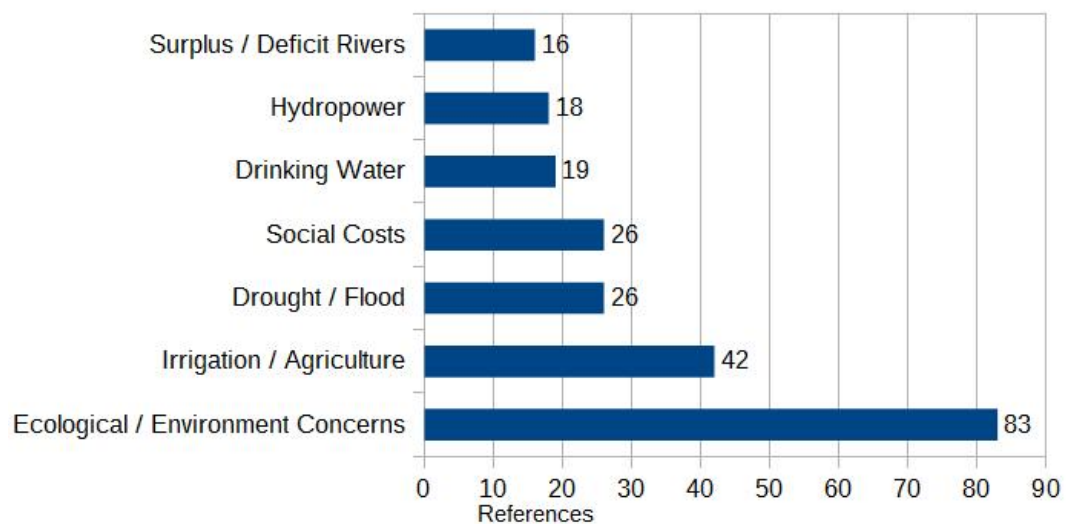


Figure 17: Codes and their rates of appearance (from ten references on) in the media coverage on the Ken-Betwa link.

### 2.2.3. Environment Discourse

The discourse on environment issues with regard to the Ken-Betwa Project to a large part resolves around the Panna Tiger Reserve. In the critical reporting on the issue, it is mainly experts on wildlife and environment that are quoted, and who point to the project's severe consequences for the tiger population (cf. i.e. India Today 2009). Babele in an article published in *India Today* for example points out:

The dream is big and promises are high. But environmentalists ask two fundamental questions: First, whether the Ken river has so much of surplus water, and second, can a nation spending billions of rupees on saving tigers afford to submerge around 5,000 hectares of land in Panna Tiger Reserve? [...] Ajay Dube, an environment activist in Bhopal, said: "If the government itself wants to kill the tigers, why is it running such national parks?" This is a sensitive issue and so far has proved to be the main hurdle to the dam project (Babele 2015).

The assumption of "surplus" water carried by the Ken river is questioned and the contradiction of one the one hand supporting tiger saving programs in the country whilst submerging part of the Panna Tiger Reserve is pointed to. The question posed by the activists polemically puts this seemingly contradictory government actions in a nutshell.

This core premise of "surplus" water availability is also referred to by other critics who elucidate that in many cases water flows differ in seasons which makes the current measurement based on the annual water flow not a sound measure. Others point out that, due to climate change, already a large share of the rivers concerned do have less water than stated in the original plans. So does for example Yadav in *Down to Earth* who refers to a review of the project, conducted by the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP), that challenges "the very basis of assuming Ken as a surplus and Betwa as a deficit basin" (Singh Yadav 2004).

Several years later, Aji in *India Today* quotes Himanshu Takkar from the SANDRP: "Both rivers run through the Bundelkhand region and when one is in flood, the other also overflows. When one is facing drought, the second also goes through it. There is no basis for the proposition that Ken is surplus and Betwa is

deficit" (Aji 2010). Pallavi in *Down to Earth* in 2014 mentions environmental activist Medha Patkar also questioning the data on the surplus and deficit flows (cf. Pallavi 2014a). In a further article Pallavi quotes Brji Gopal, former professor of environmental science at Jawaharlal Nehru University, to underline that "the assumption of "surplus" water in the basin is based on wrong calculations and ignores the frequency of drought in the Ken basin" (Pallavi 2014b).

Likewise Babele in *India Today* in 2015 raises the question of the actual availability of surplus water. Again it is Himanshu Thakkar who is referred to in support of the argument (cf. Babele 2015). In the most recent article in the collected data that raised the issue, it is Ashish Sagar, again an environmental activist, how is quoted: "Ken is not a perennial river and so does not have excess water and the threat of flooding, which the government is using as a ruse, is only there for three months during peak rainy seasons" (Jaiswal and Dasgupta 2016).

Next to this critique, it is also the negotiations for environmental clearances that are reported upon and scrutinized. Irregularities in the processes, such as project reports that include trees and animals that do not exist in the areas, are reported upon and based on the findings the validity of the project is questioned. An article by Deep published in *The Times of India*, raises the issue by pointing to the ignored climate change impact in the decision of providing environmental clearances. He quotes environmentalist Bittu Sehgal from a meeting on these clearances:

I am well aware of the political and contractor-driven dimensions to the environmental clearances issued by your committee [...] In an era of climate change, forests are going to be not only the primary source of water, but also our insurance against worst impacts of floods and droughts. Drowning such large forest parcels is akin to burning

lifeboats on a sinking Titanic to stay warm (Deep 2016).

A dramatic allegory is used here to critique the political actions taken concerning the implementation of the Ken-Betwa Project. Another critic, Ranjeet Singh, a former Secretary of the Forest Department, is cited with the words: "I am not against development but the facts should be presented before the board" (Saxena 2015). A fear of being branded as anti-development speaks out of his quote. This phenomenon of critics defensively distancing themselves from "anti-development" labels is also described by Werner in her work on the Tehri Dam:

If a declared and outright 'anti-dam' position was openly articulated as such, what would almost certainly ensue is that the respective person or position would be branded as 'anti-modern' and 'antidevelopment'. The problem is that such an imputation gains its meaning from the subscription to a teleological understanding of progress. Thus, being 'anti-modern' is equated with being 'traditionalist' in the sense of 'backward' - and since the modern nation-state clamours for a monopoly of definitions, one risks being branded 'anti-national' as well. The obvious result is that a critical position [...] can be easily excluded from the developmental discourse by being labelled unrealistic, nostalgic, romantic, or worse, a feudalist promotion of poverty. This, presumably, is the main reason why defensive attitudes with regard to the challenge of hegemonic paradigms are so common (Werner 2015, 214).

A clear positioning and a branding of being "anti-development" therefore could easily lead to an exclusion from the discourse, which explains the defensive approach taken by Ranjeet Singh in the quote above.

Next to the critique concerning the transparency on how environmental clearances were given, the media's attention is also caught by political staffing decisions made in this context: R Srinivas Murthy, director of the reserve since the tiger reintroduction phase, was transferred in 2015. As the *Hindustan Times* suggest, his new posting might be politically motivated as he was an opponent of the Ken-Betwa Link (cf. Hindustan Times 2015a; on the issue also cf. Saxena 2015).

After having addressed the opponents, the chapter will now consider the political reaction of the proponents on the other hand. One reappearing narrative used by the proponents is "people versus animals", in which the former's interest should outweigh those of the latter. Koshy in *The Hindu* in 2016 describes the issue the following way: "An ambitious project to link Ken and Betwa rivers has become a stage for a unique man-animal conflict" (Koshy 2016). The narrative of animals versus humans is also for example used by Minister of State for Rural Development Pradeep Kumar Jain: "People are more important to us than tigers" (Hindustan Times 2011). Similarly Uma Bharti is quoted from a press conference:

I will not consider any reduction in the dam height...The project is getting unnecessarily delayed due to environmental activism [...] The dam will be built and if there are further delays I will launch an agitation with the several thousand thirsty inhabitants of Bundelkhand and Marathwada. [...] We have asked the Bombay Natural History Society to help us with the vultures and the reforestation plan will actually help the tigers too...People however must come first (The Hindu 2016e).

A narrative of animals versus people manifests itself in her speech. In other articles Bharti also points out that she is for environment protection, yet it is of more importance to her to create better living conditions for the people (cf.

Mohan 2016a). Likewise an article by Koshy quotes Bharti saying that "Farmers in Bundelkhand are clamouring for the project and want the water. We will take care of the wildlife but livelihoods can't be held hostage" (Koshy 2016). Once more, she chooses a dramatic image. Never is there a word of alternatives, different ways to achieve her aim of secure livelihoods to the people, although several alternative options have been proposed. In her rhetoric the people and their livelihood of Bundelkhand can only survive with the project implemented which she personally makes sure to happen.

Bharti portrays herself as fighting for the people. One example of that can also be found in *India Today* reporting on initiating a public debate on reducing the dam height, in order to cause less submergence to the Panna Tiger Reserve. Bharti's reaction was one of strong opposition: "I will not consider it at all. There will be no compromise on this. I will fight to any extent for people of Bundelkhand" (India Today 2016h). Lacking a scientific base, she also claims that the animals – next to tigers it is especially vultures that will be affected – will not be suffer but benefit from the submergence. She is quoted saying: "When the vegetarian animals will be preyed by meat-eating animals, then there will be bones available for vultures. So, the project is in the interest of all, animals and human beings" (India Today 2016h). In the same article she refers to herself as a "big environmentalist" and illustrates that by pointing out "I offer water to Tulsi, I care for ants, birds, dogs. How come my intentions be doubted when I am saying we will protect the vultures and tigers there? If there is no project, there will be no water and no life" (India Today 2016h).

Her choice of words suggests an emotional, very personal involvement of Bharti whilst setting herself up as a heroin destined to save the "backward", "starving" people of Bundelkhand. In a similarly dramatic manner Bharti was cited calling the delay in clearance of the project "a national crime", as it denies "livelihood for



70 lakh people" (India Today 2016g). Here the notion and imaginary of the project as a nation-building, unifying national project surfaces once more. To back her commitment she even "threatened to go on hunger strike<sup>16</sup> if work on it gets further prolonged" (India Today 2016g). Again she creates a sense of absolute urgency of the project, a matter of life and death. The "environmentalists" causing the delay are in her words "forcing people of the region to live in miserable conditions" (India Today 2016g). Also *The Hindu* reported a day later: "Union Water Resources Minister Uma Bharti on Tuesday threatened an agitation if there were further delays to the wildlife clearances necessary for the storied Ken-Betwa river-interlinking project" (The Hindu 2016e)

As this section showed, from a proponent perspective, it is especially Uma Bharti who fills the leading position within the debate. A recurring image she uses is that of an alleged conflict of men versus animals, in which she proclaims that she is pro-people and therefore the effects on the Tiger Reserve have to be hazarded. Contradicting this statement, the analysis has also shown a further strategy of implying that in fact the project is not of any disadvantages to the tigers, but will rather benefit them. In the media, it was especially Uma Bharti functioning as a proponent. However, there are also many critical voices by experts and activists that the reporting has given a voice on the issue of the environmental impact of the Ken-Betwa project, as the discussion above rendered visible. Furthermore, opponent's fear of being branded "anti-development" was also addressed.

The following part considers the question of inter-state disputes and how they are

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16 Hunger strikes are a form of non-violent protest that were made popular in India by Gandhi who used it in the struggle against British colonial rule. It has been a popular method ever since and continues to be strategically utilized. Also Prime Minister Modi went on a hunger strike in 2018 during a dispute with the rival Congress Party (cf. Padmanabhan 2018; The Week 2018).

being framed and debated in the newspaper and magazine reporting. If actors referring to the inter-state disputes differ or overlap with those from the debate on environmental aspects, and what arguments are used will be seen in the following section.

#### **2.2.4. Inter-State Disputes**

As visible already from the quantitative analysis, possible inter-state disputes between Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, as the two states involved in the Ken-Betwa project, are not a dominant theme within the newspaper coverage – other than for example in the case of the Polavaram Project as will be seen in the chapter on the project further ahead. However, the media coverage, hints at the process of reaching an agreement between the two states not happening completely smoothly. In 2004 Singh Yadav in *Down to Earth* reported that "Uttar Pradesh has not yet agreed to the Ken-Betwa project" (Singh Yadav 2004).

Ten years later another article in *Down to Earth* magazine pointed out that opposition to the project also exists within the Madhya Pradesh government as a member of its parliament was speaking out against the Ken-Betwa Link Plan. Pallavi reported that:

One of the reasons why the project could not progress is that the required agreement between the Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh governments could not be reached. How are these hurdles to be overcome? There are no answers (Pallavi 2014a).

According to the author's account, a subtle dispute exists, or at least some discrepancies which lead the states to not finding an agreement. Possible reasons for the subliminal dispute are analysed by Noronha in the *Hindustan Times*. The

article points out that "Madhya Pradesh will literally pay a huge price for the Ken-Betwa river linking project but neighbouring Uttar Pradesh will gain the most from this ambitious plan". The price to be paid includes "submergence, reduction in volume of water, displacement of population and loss of wildlife habitat". The article further quotes anonymous sources in the Water Resources Department which point to a continuity in unequal treatment of the two states involved: "With stronger political influence, UP [Uttar Pradesh] has traditionally reaped all the benefits" (Noronha 2014).

In December 2016 *The Times of India* also covered the difference of opinion of the two states involved. In the article Mohan reported on a letter of environmentalists sent to Uma Bharti pointing to missing clearances and agreements that the government would be in need to obtain, such as district clearances and clearances of the National Ganga River Conservation Authorities, to proceed with the project in accordance with the law. The letter points out that "these authorities are yet to be constituted and thus their clearances are still pending" (Mohan 2016b). On the issue of inter-state agreements it is added: "There was no inter-state agreement between Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh for implementation of the project as the earlier agreement of August 2005 was only for preparation of Detailed Project Report (DPR)". The letter quoted in the article concludes "Without all these and more (mandatory clearances) in place, any work would be clearly illegal" (Mohan 2016b).

As seen from the discussed articles, there are tensions at place concerning the agreements and clearances to be given, also between the two states involved. However details of the discussion or more in-depth analysis of possible disagreements are not covered in the media. The discussion seems to take place outside of the public sphere, though as seen above, some reporters point to the issues. Politicians seem to refrain from bringing their concerns on the issue to the

media's attention.

### **2.2.5. Irrigation & Agriculture Narratives**

Other than the inter-state disputes, possible irrigation and agriculture benefits are two aspects of the Ken-Betwa project that are discussed more extensively. As the quantitative analysis has shown, after environmental concerns, irrigation and agriculture is the second most appearing topic in the data. Pallavi in *Down to Earth* magazine for example pointed out in 2014 that the project "claims to provide assured irrigation to 127,000 ha of agricultural land in the Raisen and Vidisha district of Madhya Pradesh, along with added benefit to some 47,000 ha area in the drought-prone districts of Hamirpur and Jhansi in Uttar Pradesh and Chhattarpur and Tikamgarh in Madhya Pradesh" (Pallavi 2014a). The same magazine featured an article by Goswami in 2016 referring to 635,000 ha that will be irrigated with water from the Daudhan Dam (cf. Goswami 2016).

Proponents of the project use the numbers on irrigation benefits in advocating for the project. In 2005 it was Priyaranjan Dasmunsi, Minister of Water Resources at the time, that, according to a *Hindustan Times* article, pointed out that the canal construction:

As per the preliminary studies carried out by NWDA, the Ken – Betwa Link proposal will benefit both the States in their districts namely Chhattarpur, Tikamgarh, Panna, Raisen and Vidisha in MP and Hamirpur, Jhansi and Banda in UP by way of increased and stabilized irrigation, consequent increase in the production of food and commercial crops, improved availability of drinking water, flood and drought mitigation and other increased economic activities like pisciculture, afforestation, tourism, generation of hydro-power and

ecological improvement programmes (Hindustan Times 2005b).

In another *Hindustan Times* article appearing the same day, the opinion was a similarly optimistic one. The project therein is called "a boon for Madhya Pradesh, as it would generate 72 megawatt of electricity besides creating annual irrigation potential in an area of 3.23 lakh hectares" (Hindustan Times 2005c). Subsequently the article lists the areas benefiting from increased irrigation (Jhansi-Lalitpur of Uttar Pradesh, Vidisha and Raisen districts of Upper Betwa area, districts of Chhatarpur and Panna).

In the same year, Prasai for *The Hindu* reported on the signing of the agreement on the preparation of the DPR between Madhya Pradesh und Uttar Pradesh. Being one of the few articles within the collected data on the Ken-Betwa media coverage in which the concerned Chief Ministers appear, Madhya Pradesh's then Chief Minister Babulal Gau is quoted saying that "the link would help farmers and the poor in the State" (Parsai 2005). The reference to the poverty in the region and therefore the need of increased irrigation facilities is a reoccurring theme in the Ken-Betwa news coverage.

In 2015 *Hindustan Times* reported on an environment ministry panel approving the Ken-Betwa project. In the article the project is once more portrayed in a very beneficial light as it "will turn the arid Bundelkhand region straddling the two states into a waterrich agricultural zone, benefiting 1,27,000 hectares of farmland" (Hindustan Times 2015a). From "arid region" to a "waterrich agricultural zone" evokes images of lush green fields and transports the message of a very beneficial project, an assumption which is not challenged in this article. Similarly so, a 2016 *Hindustan Times* article speaks of the project's help in irrigating "6.75 lakh hectares of land in the poverty-ridden Bundelkhand region" (Hindustan Times 2016a). Uma Bharti, as quoted in another *Hindustan Times* article the following

month, uses a similar wording when advocating the project. She is quoted saying: "It [the Ken-Betwa Project] will bring water to drought-prone Bundelkhand and help irrigate six lakh hectares of land" (Hindustan Times 2016b).

Also Aji in *India Today* is pointing to the irrigation benefits: "A major portion of the Rs 7,000-crore project is aimed at linking the Ken and Betwa rivers to provide irrigation facilities in the backward regions that spread across 14 districts of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh" (Aji 2010). The backward-, drought-prone-, and poverty-riddenness of the area seems to be a common feature that needs to be pointed out when referring to the project. Indirectly the idea of development and enhancement of the region through the project is thereby implied in the mentioned articles. One could claim that the project is seen as a measure of moving from the axis of backwardness to the axis of development, progress and modernity.

A letter by the National Tiger Conservation Authority addressing the chief wildlife wardens of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh and calling for the establishment of a committee to watch over the Ken-Beta construction works out of concern for the tiger habitation, is quoted in a November 2016 *India Today* article. It includes the following passage, once more relating to the poverty of the region concerned:

In respect of water and livelihood issues, if project estimates are realistic, the socio-economic status of people in Bundelkhand region is likely to get a major facelift. Given that the region is poverty-ridden, the realised benefit of the project cannot be ignored and there would certainly be a need to strike a balance between wildlife considerations and peoples livelihood concerns (India Today 2016q).

Promises are high according to the cited article: "a major facelift" of the "socio-economic status of people" does sound like a great, positive change to the region.

Though sounding promising, it could however be questioned in how far the socio-economic status is likely to be subject to a complete change through the implementation of a water project. Koshy in *The Hindu* in 2016 offers a more balanced perspective of the proposed benefits, pointing out proponents' and opponents' perspectives, yet also points to the economic status of the region concerned. He writes that "proponents of the project [...] say that the proposed Daudhan dam and the 2.5 km canal [...] are critical to irrigate nearly 7,00,000 hectares in drought-ravaged Bundelkhand" (Koshy 2016). Ensuing, the article also picture the opponents side: "However, environmentalists [...] allege that most districts in Madhya Pradesh will not actually get the promised water" (Koshy 2016).

Also *The Times of India* writes that "the Ken-Betwa project is expected to [...] help irrigate 6.75 lakh hectares of land in the poverty-ridden Bundelkhand region" (The Times of India 2016i). Naveen in another *The Times of India* article refers to the project's purpose as to providing "water in the drought prone Bundelkhand region and for irrigating about 6 lakh hectares of land" (Naveen 2016). The same wording is used by *The Hindu* reporting on the irrigation benefits for "drought-prone Bundelkhand" (The Hindu 2016n). The article further quotes National Board for Wildlife member V.B. Mathur saying that "the project will bring water to one of India's worst drought-affected regions" (The Hindu 2016n)

All the above discussed articles show that irrigation is mentioned as a major driving force in implementing the project. As compared to the general NRLP debate on irrigation, this is however not confronted with rising population numbers and increased need for foodgrain production or with strengthening the agriculture based economy, but rather with the poverty prevailing in the areas concerned. It is striking how similar the wording used by the different authors and also by the people quoted, being it politicians or environmentalists, in describing

the purpose of the project and the economic situation of the people in the region, is. Though often made, the exact mechanism of how the problem of a poor socio-economic status or poverty of the people in the region is being solved by implementing the project remains rather vague. None of the articles provides a more detailed description of how this is to happen or in how far exactly the project would have a beneficial influence on the socio-economic status of the region's inhabitants. The only information provided is that land will get irrigated. Is it that inhabitants living on subsistence agriculture will be able to grow more crops that they can then sell on the market? Is it through job opportunities in the dam building process that the socio-economic status will be lifted? Who are the owners of the land that will become subject to irrigation? Or is it rather large scale farming that will benefit and not those "poor farmers" hinted at? Though it is made clear that the area is poverty-ridden, it does not become exactly clear how this issue is being tackled through the project, yet poverty is mentioned as one of the major causes for why the project is needed in the particular area.

#### **2.2.6. Discourse on Social Costs**

As visualised in the beginning of this chapter, displacement and resettlement are topics that do appear in the debate on the Ken-Betwa Project, yet to a smaller extend than i.e. the question of environmental concerns. There is only very few articles elaborating on possible social consequences. These will be presented in the following section.

Looking at the reporting on the social costs, it becomes visible that many details about the social consequences are unknown. Rather than resettlement, social costs with regard to for example people living downstream of the planned reservoir and how their livelihoods will be effected, become an issue. *The Hindu* already in 2006 reported that the project "would completely ruin sand mining, irrigation



facility and dependent agriculture and fishing into the Yamuna basin for hundreds of kilometres downstream", thereby affecting "several lakh people", a much higher number of people therefore suffering from the project's consequence than benefiting from it (Hindustan Times 2006a).

According to a NWDA report the number of PAP that need to be resettled is at 8,550 people, equalling 900 families (cf. National Water Development Agency 2010b). 6.84% of affected households are Scheduled Caste, 36% Scheduled Tribe households (cf. National Water Development Agency 2015). By contrast, the numbers on resettlement cited by *The Hindu*, which are said to be based on a project report by the Water Ministry, are "about 6,388 people in 10 villages [that] will be affected due to the submergence by Daudhan reservoir and 13,499 persons living in the 28 villages [that] will be affected due to the submergence by Makodia reservoir" (The Hindu 2016n) thereby deviating by over 11,000 people from the NWDA report. Pallavi in *Down to Earth* points out on the issue:

The number of families which will be impacted by the project is different in different parts of the report, ranging from a few hundred to a few thousand. The assessment of impacts, says Brij Mohan, is highly skewed. The impact of fragmentation of habitat within the Panna National Park has been downplayed greatly. No account has been taken of 10 years of construction work and the proposed construction of a colony for 6,000 families of workers within the park. The EIA [Environmental Impact Assessment] goes on to say that submergence will be positive for the park as it will remove encroachments by some 500 families of tribals who have been living there for centuries. Forest officials say that land submergence inside the reserve has been estimated by the EIA to be at seven per cent, while it is actually likely to be to the tune of 28 to 30 per cent (Pallavi 2014b).

Pallavi continues the article by referring to government meetings with the affected local population. According to the article the local population seems to have little information. She quotes one local resident:

We do not know what this project is about [...] We came only because a jeep came to our village, saying we were going to be displaced and that we should come to the public hearing. We have come to demand a fair compensation for displacement, because we know we can't stop the government from throwing us out (Pallavi 2014b).

Next to Pallavi, there is one further article comprehensively discussing the issue of social costs. It was written by Babele and was published in *India Today* in September 2015. He reproaches the NWDA with not consulting the people in the affected areas. The article further contains an investigation revealing that a village, which according to the NWDA reports has been evacuated already in 2007, is still intact with a population of 2,500 people. The same seems to have happened in three other villages in the area. One villager hearing this information by the reporter asks: "If they don't consider us as villagers, how will they compensate us?" (Babele 2015).

Babele also addresses the issue of compensation payment, which are considered to be very low. In response, the NWDA is quoted saying that there will be a new formula with higher compensations. The article further reports on villagers that narrate that no government official has ever come to provide information about the project. The article concludes that "Any side may be right or there is also a possibility of grey areas, but people still have right to be consulted before any action". Babaela also warns the NWDA to be more careful "as their casualness can harm people in big way and may open a way to a stronger agitation" (Babele 2015).

The two above discussed articles published in *Down to Earth* and *India Today* both offer perspectives from the locally affected, to a large percentage Adivasi, population. Subaltern voices are heard in these, which is why these articles are a striking exception in the reporting on the Ken-Betwa Project. The majority of articles on the Ken-Betwa refrains from offering perspectives of those affected. When considering which topics politicians address in relation to the Ken-Betwa Project, it also becomes apparent that within the collected data there is not a single article in which a political figure address the issue of social costs. The following chapter will take a closer look at these political narratives,

### **2.2.7. Political Narratives**

Concerning the lead political figures in the debate, the central government has a high rate of appearance when compared to the regional governments. Out of the 81 articles analysed Prime Minister Narendra Modi is mentioned in 15 (in 19% of the articles) and central water Minister Uma Bharti in 25 documents (in 31% of the articles), whereas the two Chief Ministers of the states concerned play a very subordinate role. Akhilesh Yadav, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh and President of the regional centre-left Samajwadi Party, is mentioned in 8 documents (in 10% of the articles), whereas current Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh Shivraj Singh Chouhan's name, member of Modi's BJP party, appears only in 6 documents (in 7% of the articles). As also the analysis above has already shown, Uma Bharti is very prominent in the debates. Already raised in the preceding part, this subchapter now enlargers upon the appearing political figures in the newspaper and magazine articles and their role in discursively framing the Ken-Betwa Project.

The significance of the Ken-Betwa Project not only for the region, but as a signalling effect for the whole nation, had been set by former Prime Minister

Vajpayee, a big supporter of the NRLP scheme, who according to Parsai's article published in *The Hindu* saw in the Ken-Betwa Project a "bold and historic initiative, set to change the water management paradigm in the country" (Parsai 2005). A few years later it was especially Rahul Gandhi's Bundelkhand package which initiated the concrete planning and implementation phase of the Ken-Betwa river link (cf. Ghosh 2011). In February 2010 Aji in *India Today* reported on the then Rs 7,000-crore project aiming at providing "irrigation facilities in the backward regions that spread across 14 districts of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh" (Aji 2010). Reporting stagnated in the following years until Modi's government assumed office in 2014. With Cabinet Minister for Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation Uma Bharti an important figure for the debate on the NRLP, as seen in the previous chapter, entered the scene. She is the leading political figure in the debate on the Ken-Betwa link. As the central government is very prominent in the coverage on the Ken-Betwa link, the following part analyses which role the central government and within it especially Bharti plays in the media coverage and what imaginaries are used by the politicians when cited in the reporting on the Ken-Betwa Project.

The importance of the Ken-Betwa Project to the Modi government is visible in the newspaper coverage through statements such as one from Naveen in *The Times of India* in September 2015 naming the project "Brainchild of Vajpayee and dream project of Narendra Modi" (Naveen 2015a). The link to the central government is again made by Naveen a few months later by referring to it as "Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Ken-Betwa river-linking project" (Naveen 2015b). In *India Today* reporter Babele evokes a similar connection between the project and the Prime Minister: "The 10-year-old scheme may see the light of the day as Narendra Modi Cabinet approved the project in July [...] The dream is big and promises are high" (Babele 2015). In relation to Bharti's statements in parliament Babele also writes of the government pushing the NRLP as the "ultimate solution for

country's water problems [...] In their [the government's] point of view, drought and deluge will become history after river linking" (Babele 2015).

Bharti in her speeches that the newspapers and magazines refer to, fends off criticism by pointing to the support that the project has by the Supreme Court and uses this central authority's approval as a point of reference in her promotion of the project (cf. India Today 2015b). Bharti is supported by Union Minister of State for Water Resources Sanwar Lal Jat who "stated that inter-linking of rivers is being supervised by Supreme Court and "hence, no one should doubt the integrity of Centre on this issue"" (India Today 2015b).

An analysis of Uma Bharti's approach to the project is provided by Koshy in *The Hindu*. The author explains Bharti's impatience by pointing out that Ken-Betwa is the first NRLP project and serves as a "testing ground" for the other projects to come, which the government would like to proceed with (Koshy 2016). Ken-Betwa's importance for an overall success in proceeding with a nation wide river linking project is recognized thereby. As already Vajpayee pointed out, as quoted earlier, a whole new paradigm in water management is supposed to be set by the project. What exactly this new paradigm is composed of is not quite clear, but it can be assumed that it would include a new approach towards nature, an idea of reshaping nature and overcoming existing features of the landscape in order to redraw geography in a new way that supposedly benefits the people. The new water paradigm could be one where nature is subdued by the people.

Yet Uma Bharti's engagement with the Ken-Betwa Project might not only be linked to the project's role in setting out new paradigms for the whole country or to make sure that the NRLP on a larger scale starts off favourably for the government, but *The Times of India* also identified some possible links to her being an MP elected in UP herself and with strong interest to be re-elected:

It is learnt that the Water Resources Ministry is keen to start work in January itself, in an effort to showcase the work as a 'new year gift' to the people of Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. The move has the potential of sending a positive signal to the electorate of UP ahead of the state assembly elections, likely in February (Mohan 2016b).

Similarly Jaiswal and Dasgupta in *Hindustan Times* refer to activist Ashish Sagar's assessment "that the BJP is pushing this project because it wants to get Rajput and Kshatriya votes of Jhansi by promising drinking water. Uma Bharti is a Lodh Rajput" (Jaiswal and Dasgupta 2016). They also recognize how much her person is linked to the success of the proceedings of the Ken-Betwa project by calling it "Jhansi MP Uma Bharti's dream project" (Jaiswal and Dasgupta 2016). Likewise Goswami in *Down to Earth* titles it as the "dream project for Uma Bharti, Union Minister for Water Resources and an MP from Jhansi" (Goswami 2016). Saxena mocking Uma Bharti's high promises, remarks sarcastically: "If Union water resources minister Uma Bharti is to be believed, the backward region of Bundelkhand will become like Switzerland and Germany after completion of Ken-Betwa Link Project" (Saxena 2016). Saxena refers to Switzerland and Germany as in India these countries are often seen as the epitome of greenery. Switzerland and its landscape are also a very prominent feature of Bollywood movies, making his statement a reference to an imaginary of "an enticing paradise, heaven on earth [...] Switzerland has long been a fantasy focus in the everyday life of Indian film fans" (Museum für Gestaltung Zürich 2002)<sup>17</sup>.

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17 On Switzerland in Bollywood movies also see: A. Schneider and Museum für Gestaltung Zürich 2002; Josian, Spears, and Dutta 2014.

Another way of Uma Bharti entering the discourse has been documented in *India Today*:

Union minister Uma Bharti today said wildlife clearance for the ambitious Ken-Betwa river linking project is "about to be announced" and suggested that her ministry is awaiting minutes of the meeting in which the approval was given. Bharti said she is "excited" over the clearance, but is "keeping quiet" as Minister of State for Environment and Forest Anil Dave has asked her not to say anything in this regard till the minutes are "okayed". "Wildlife clearance to the Ken-Betwa river linking project is about to be announced... The Environment Minister has asked me not to say anything about it till the minutes (of the meeting in which the clearance was apparently given) are okayed. "Therefore, I am keeping quite...I am filled with excitement but the Minister has asked me not to say anything about it," she said (India Today 2016k).

Providing the information that the clearance has been given whilst pointing out that she is "keeping quite" on the issue seems to be a very contradictory, somewhat unprofessional approach that Bharti is taking. The excitement that she expresses on the clearance creates an image of her as a person profusely engaged in the benefit of the common people, sharing the thrill of new water and irrigation possibilities. Paired with her above discussed (rhetoric) engagement of going into a hunger strike if clearances are not given, and speaking of delaying the project as a national crime, she portrays herself as working very hard in the best interest of the people- those excluded from the benefits, i.e. those affected by displacement are however absent in her remarks.

In the subchapters on the Ken-Betwa Project it became very visible that in the analysed data the political debates are dominated by central government politicians. Yet, it must be kept in mind that Uma Bharti though now a Cabinet Minister and thereby a representative of the union government, originates in Madhya Pradesh and has previously served as a Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh. Also she has been politically active in Uttar Pradesh, where it was the Jhansi constituency, which will benefit from the Ken-Betwa Project to a great extent, from which she was elected to the Lok Sabha. Though officially part of the central government, her ties to the region, in which the project is planned to be implemented, are strong. The politicians currently serving in the region however seem hardly involved in the project. The Chief Ministers of the two states concerned refrain from participating in the discourse.

The opponents, with few exclusions, mainly emphasize the ecological concerns, which especially Bharti reacts to comprehensively by employing different strategies such as denying negative impacts or by referring to an alleged conflict between animals and people in which she sides with the former. In how far Bharti as the Union Water Minister appears in the debate on the Polavaram Dam, will be seen in the next chapter analysing a project at a much more advanced implementation phase than the Ken-Betwa Project. Who is involved in the newspaper and magazine debates in the case of the Polavaram Project and how the discourse is shaped, will be discussed.



## **2.3. The Polavaram Project**

### **2.3.1. Introduction**

In the following part the Polavaram Project on the Godavari river in Andhra Pradesh will be introduced, before proceeding with the analysis of newspaper and magazine articles on the project. The introduction will provide a better understanding project's background, in order to allow for a more comprehensible analysis.

Within the NRLP, the Polavaram (“Indirasagar”) Project is one of the components of the Peninsular River Development Scheme, particularly of the interlinking of the Mahanadi – Godavari – Krishna – Pennar – Cauvery – Vaigai rivers (cf. Water Resources Information System of India 2012). It involves the construction of two canals, one of which has already been built. The Polavaram Left Canal will be transferring water to the city of Visakhapatnam. The Polavaram Right Canal, finished in September 2015, is designed as a link between Godavari and Krishna river and flows through the West Godavari and the Krishna districts of Andhra Pradesh. From the reservoir the canal traverses 174 km until it falls into the river Budameru. From there on it is let into the Budameru Diversion Channel in order to join the river Krishna 8 km upstream of the already existing Prakasam Dam at Vijayawada (cf. Water Resources Information System of India 2012).

From the transported water, less than half will arrive at the Krishna delta. The other half will be used to a larger share for en route irrigation, which is supposed to water an area of 3,45,305 acre (1,39,740 ha), whereas a smaller share will be used for en route domestic and industrial requirements (cf. Water Resources Information System of India 2012). The height of the dam wall itself lies at 46 metres (151 feet) (cf. Tata 2010). Apart from providing water to the fast growing

city of Visakhapatnam, creating irrigation possibilities, ensuring the supply of water for industrial purposes as well as the general networking of rivers, the Andhra Pradesh government emphasizes the hydro-power scheme, generating 960 MW, as a benefit of the dam (cf. Stewart and Rukmini Rao 2006; Tata 2010).



*Figure 18: Map of the dam site and Polavaram Right Link Canal (Tata 2010).*

The side clearance for the construction of the dam was given by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF) in September 2005; the environmental clearances in October that same year. Although other clearances such as the forest clearance were not given at that time, constructions already started in 2005. The controversial early start without all the necessary clearances in 2006 was explained by the government the following way:

Some clearances have already come and others are awaited. Our intention is to continue project work and ensure that the farmers are

benefited at the earliest. At the same time, we have not violated any law, including the forest laws, as we have not commenced any work on the forest land because forest clearance is still to come. Though the centre has instructed states not to take up works even on non-forest lands, before getting forest clearances, we have taken up works on non-forest lands, and this is not a major violation of the law (Chandra 2006, 37).

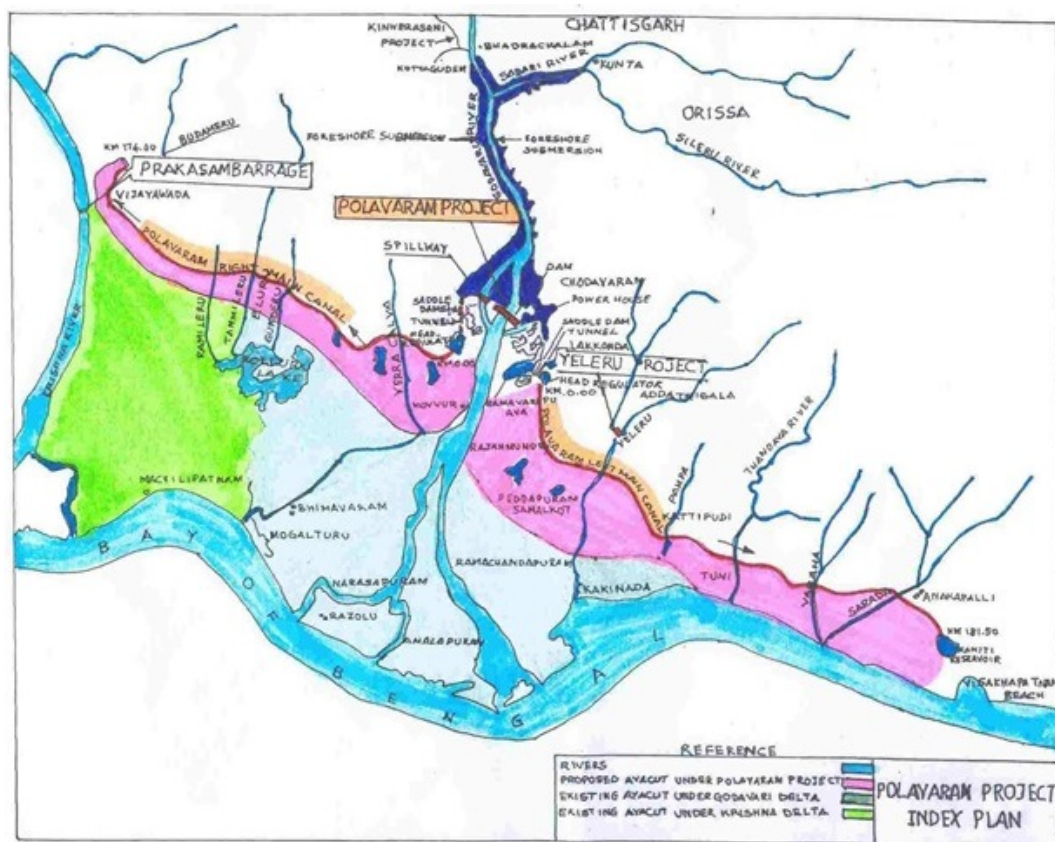


Figure 19: Map of the Polavaram Project including both link canals (red) and the areas under submergence (dark blue) (Ministry of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation 2017).

Whilst admitting to act against the centre's instructions, the Andhra Pradesh government do not seem to be discern any wrongdoing. Instead the early start without the necessary clearances is justified by pointing at the "higher good" of farmers' benefits. Yet, as anticipated by the federal government, forest clearances were given in 2010. In 2014 the project was assigned national status (cf. Odisha Sun Times 2014). In 2013/14 the Polavaram Project played a major role in the negotiations regarding the reorganisation of the state of Andhra Pradesh and the formation of the new state of Telangana. The Andhra Pradesh state made the approval of the Polavaram Project a fundamental condition for entering into negotiations with Telangana. It was in that process that national status was declared, which makes the project eligible to funds from the central government. However, until May 2017, the project implementation remained in the hands of the Andhra Pradesh government and the central government was not further involved in it than through funding.

As the construction of the Polavaram Right Canal was already finished in 2015, the Andhra Pradesh government added a further, temporary component to the Polavaram Project. Within the time span of one year the Pattiseema lift irrigation project was built and inaugurated by Andhra Pradesh's Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu in 2016. The scheme pumps water through the canal linking Godavari and Krishna River, which will be connected to the Polavaram Dam once its construction is completed. A few months after the opening, the first breach occurred in the Polavaram Right Canal attracting the media's attention (cf. The Times of India 2016d; The Hindu 2016g, 2016h).

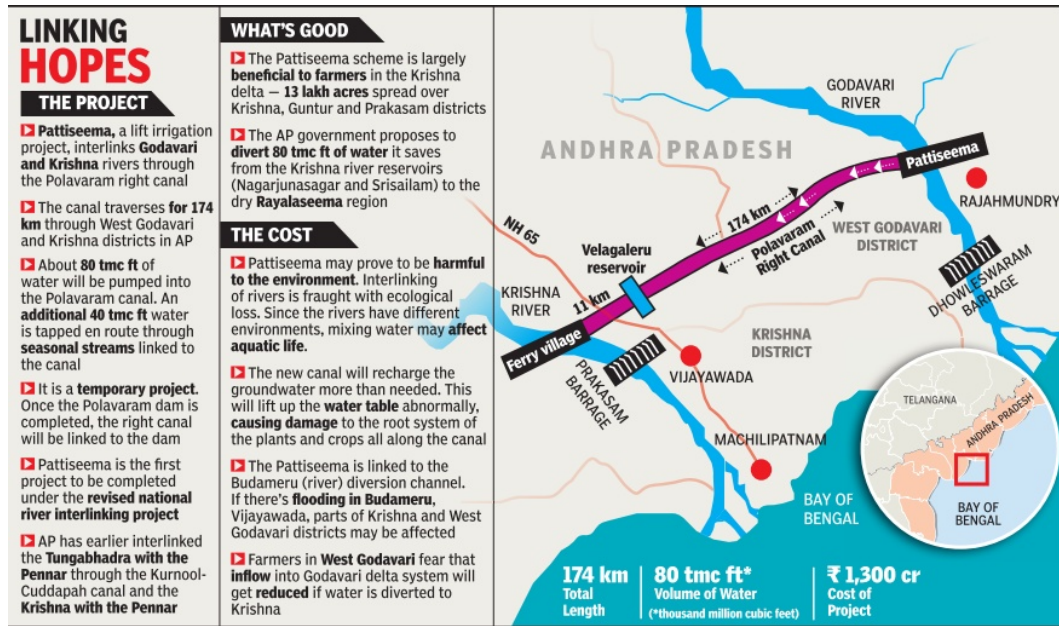


Figure 20: Pattiseema Lift Irrigation Project (The Times of India 2015).

Apart from the general critique applied also to the NRLP, there are some specific issues linked to the Polavaram Dam that are pointed out by critics. One of the major concerns is the displacement of a large number of people through the dam. Information on numbers vary, some assume that around 400,000 people will be displaced (cf. Mahapatra 2011). Nearly 70% of those affected by displacement are Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe population (cf. Bhushan and Murali 1994). It will thereby be the largest displacement for the construction of a dam in India's history. Bushan and Murali discuss the composition of communities affected by the submergence and point out that non-tribal communities in the area are often government or NGO employees or merchants "without any permanent assets". They therefore argue that it is "evident that the population going to be affected due to submergence is essentially and predominantly tribal" (Bhushan and Murali 1994, 103).

The communities the worst affected by displacement are the Konda Reddy and Koya communities. As much as the actual number of displaced people is under debate, so is the extend of the submergence area. Many voices have raised in concern of the calculation of it: not only Godavari river, but also rivers flowing into Godavari will be strongly affected by the backlog of the water. Government calculations are thought to be unrealistic and the extent of submergence is considered to be greater than the Andhra Pradesh government declares. Furthermore, a dam break analysis reveals that in case of an earthquake – the dam is constructed on a high risk earthquake prone area – the dam is likely to break. If this were to happen, millions of people could drown, including the population of 400,000 in the city of Rajahmundry.

Also the irrigation scheme of the dam project is highly disputed as even according to the government's official data, 71 per cent of the command area under the right canal is already under irrigation since 1999 (cf. Mahapatra 2011). Many more canals have been built in the area since that time. A study from the International Water Management Institute in Sri Lanka found that 95% of the area is already under irrigation, and the remaining 5% are not under cultivation (cf. Mahapatra 2011). Even though the major and defining purpose of the project is the irrigation of the cultivable command area there seems to be little known need for further irrigation (cf. Stewart and Rukmini Rao 2006).

Another aspect is the problem of sedimentation, as the Godavari carries a great amount of sand. Dam opponents expect the dam to be sanded very quickly. Sedimentation is foreseen to lead to a radical reduction of the dam's proposed benefits in a few years. Likewise, in terms of energy production, sedimentation would render the dam ineffective in a short period of time. Stewart and Rao point to the sedimentation rates of Indian dams: on average they are "three to five times

greater than predicted" (Stewart and Rukmini Rao 2006, 21). For dams in the Godavari Basin they foresee that they: "are always going to silt up quickly and probably much faster than envisaged. It is unlikely that actual irrigation command area values achieved in the first few years will be repeated in future years – and in 50 years the dam will most likely be almost useless because of sedimentation" (Stewart and Rukmini Rao 2006, 21). Through the sanding the submergence area will grow year by year. Furthermore, deforestation will contribute to increasing siltation. With the displacement of the communities uphill migration will start. Not only will forest be submerged, but deforestation could continue uphill as land might be cleared for new settlements (cf. Bhushan and Murali 1994).

Furthermore, critics question the underlying assumption that there is no benefit in letting the water flow into the sea 'unused', a notion that is very often used in justifying also the NRLP in general. As the engineer Hanumatha Rao notes, the construction of the Sir Arthur Cotton barrage, 42 km downstream of the planned Polavaram Dam, already had an enormous impact on the environment. While in rainy seasons water is still flowing into the sea, in non-rainy periods and during summer, the water is totally diverted to the canals. Flows to the sea prior to the construction of the barrage resulted in healthy mangroves along the coast and the river mouth. Since the construction of the barrage the mangroves have suffered immensely. Salt-water intrusion adds to the problem. Through the lack of out-flowing water, salination of inland groundwater occurs. Some villages on the coast therefore nowadays need to be provided with freshwater by tankers (cf. Rao 2005). Even though Rao warns against the aggravation of this situation, he also points out that the construction of the Polavaram Project could also be an opportunity if a steady flow of water into the sea also in summer and non-rainy season months would be provided.





*Image 1: Construction side of the dam wall and Godavari (by author, Sept. 2012).*

A further important part of the discussion on the construction of the Polavaram Project revolves around the dispute with the affected neighbouring states: Odisha and Chhattisgarh. This issue will be enlarged upon in the section on the media coverage of the inter-state dispute. Yet before moving towards the qualitative media analysis, the chapter will introduce the quantitative findings from the data.





*Image 2: Construction side of the dam wall and Godavari (by author, Sept. 2012).*



*Image 3: Tunnel construction as part of the left canal (by author, Sept. 2012).*





*Image 4: Already excavated canal filled with rain water (by author, Sept. 2012).*



*Image 5: Godavari at Devipatnam (by author, Sept. 2012).*

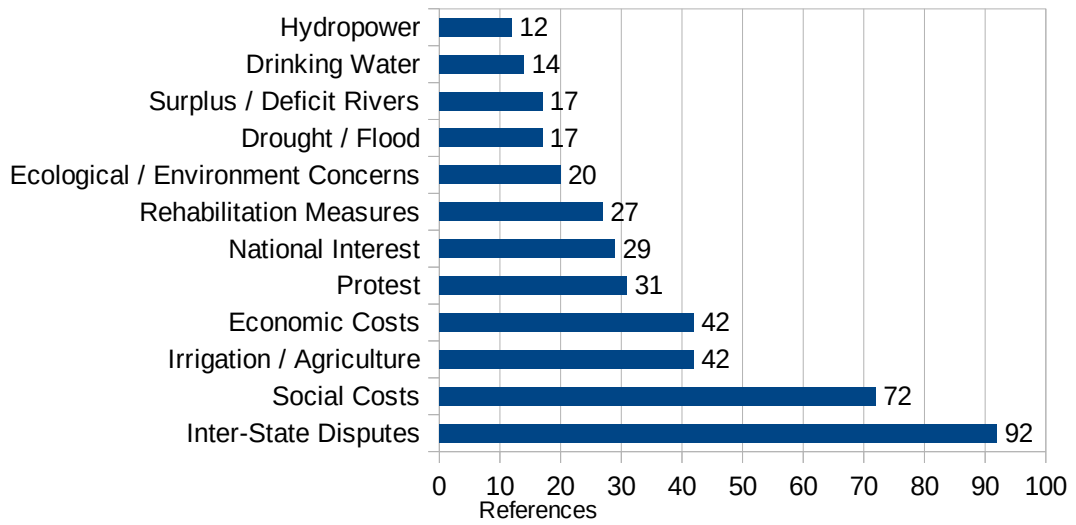
### 2.3.2. Quantitative Aspects of the Media Analysis

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Hindustan Times	1	1	0	1	10	4	1	0	5	1	1	25
Down to Earth	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	2	3	0	8
India Today	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	4	12	32	52
Times of India	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	4	25	32
The Hindu	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	24	32	72	130
Total	1	2	1	1	13	5	3	2	37	52	130	<b>247</b>

Figure 21: Publications and numbers of articles on the Polavaram Project per year.

The data that will be used for the analysis contains articles from *Hindustan Times* (25), *Down to Earth* (8), *India Today* (53), *The Times of India* (32), and *The Hindu* (129). The data covers articles from 2006 until 2016, yet out of the total of 247 articles 219 have been published in the years 2014, 2015 and 2016, in which the implementation of the scheme has started and consequently more reporting took place.

Regarding the content, the most prominent theme in the newspaper coverage is that of the inter-state disputes between Andhra Pradesh and neighbouring Chhattisgarh and Odisha. The topic appears 92 times in the collected data. The sometimes overlapping codes of social costs and rehabilitation measures both appear 72 times. They are followed by economic costs (42) and irrigation / agriculture (42). Protest against the project is also an important reappearing topic in the data (31 mentions). Less often ecological concerns (20), the idea of drought / flood relief (17), surplus and deficit rivers (17), and drinking water (14) are reported upon.



*Figure 22: Codes and their rates of appearance (from ten references on) in the media coverage on the Polavaram Project.*

### **2.3.3. Environment Discourse**

Though the topic of environmental concerns is not covered by the media to a large extent in case of the Polaavram Project, as seen from the quantitative analysis, there are articles dedicated to the issue and when doing so the articles point to many aspects concerning the environment that are seen as problematic in relation to the construction of the Polavaram Project.

The opponents argue not only against the loss of highly cultivable land but also against the loss of nearly 4,000 hectares (9,884 acres) of dense forest (cf. Mahapatra 2011). Altogether the submergence will affect around 38,184 hectares of land (94,357 acres) (cf. Rao 2005). Rare biodiversity, scarce plants, and wildlife will be lost. Part of the submergence area is also a national park that, ironically, was announced only in 2009, even though at that point of time plans for submergence had long been settled. Wildlife in the submergence zone includes bears, tigers, leopards, hyena, antelopes and bison. The Eastern Ghats are also a nesting ground for migratory birds. Godavari is furthermore known to be rich in fish, of which not only the communities benefit, but also upon which several hundred fisher families depend for their livelihood (cf. Bhushan and Murali 1994).

The Polavaram Project in existing research is often seen as an “Environmental Disaster” (P. T. Rao 2006, 1439). Through the displacement people will resettle into areas in which resources are already under stress. This will not only put these resources under even greater stress, but may also lead to conflicts between the communities. Furthermore floods are a reoccurring problem in the area – a problem that would even increase after the construction of the dam. Critics also question the underlying assumption that there is no benefit in letting the water flow into the sea 'unused'. As the engineer Hanumatha Rao notes, the construction

of the Sir Arthur Cotton barrage, 42 km downstream of the planned Polavaram Dam, already had an enormous impact on the environment. While in rainy seasons water is still flowing into the sea, in non-rainy periods and during summer, the water is completely diverted to the canals. Flows to the sea prior to the construction of the barrage resulted in healthy mangroves along the coast and the river mouth. Since the construction of the barrage the mangroves have suffered immensely. A further issue is that of salt-water intrusion. Through the lack of out-flowing water, salt-water has come into the inland groundwater. Some villages on the coast therefore now need to be provided with freshwater by tankers (cf. T. H. Rao 2005).

Though these above mentioned critique is being addressed via the media, in the examined data, there are only 20 out of 247 documents directly relating to environmental concerns. *Down to Earth*, as a magazine specialized in environment issues, plays a prominent role in the debate. It is for example pointed out that the notion of 'surplus' and 'deficit' basins might be a dangerous one. In 2008 in an article by Awasthi, the magazine quotes the director of the Freshwater and Wetland Conversation Programme of WWF (World Wide Fund For Nature) India: "The present planning of inter-basin water transfer is based on future irrigation requirement and ignores environmental water demand, which is important to maintain the ecology of the basin" (Awasthi 2008). The article continue by referring to environmentalists that say that "there is no study of the dam's impact on the delta and not taking into account the environmental use of water will result in the delta's stunted growth and lead to sea-side erosion and mangrove degradation" (Awasthi 2008).

In many other newspaper and magazine articles environmental issues are mentioned only briefly and rather as a side note, as can be exemplified by the following quote from the *Hindustan Times* article from 2009: "The leaders of the

regional party sat on a dharna in front of the Raj Bhavan in Bhubaneswar to highlight the adverse impact of the project on Orissa and said the dam would pose a great threat to the ecology and habitat in Malkangiri district" (Hindustan Times 2009a), or by an article published in *The Hindu* in 2014 referring to it in the following manner: "Apart from causing extensive loss to the rich eco-system, including Papikondalu wildlife sanctuary, the project would displace over two lakh people, mostly Adivasis" (The Hindu 2014a). In another *The Hindu* article Keerthana points out that the project will have effects on the Eastern Ghat's biodiversity. Parts of the Papikonds National Park's forests, which are located in East Godavari, West Godavari and Khammam district, will be subject to submergence. This will also impact rare animals such as some gecko and bird species (cf. Keerthana 2014). Similarly, Akbar in a *The Times of India* article relates to the damage that the dam could cause to the local flora and fauna. He points especially to the stripe-necked mongoose, which was first sighted in the Eastern Ghats in the beginning of 2016 and might lose its habitat through the submergence. Akbar concludes: "The threat to the animal should be studied in detail before the dam is ready" (Akbar 2016).

From a proponent side, there is especially one article that stands out. The article published in September 2016 in *The Times of India* is titled "Link rivers before they turn into troubled waters!". The author remains anonymous, leaving the audience wondering whether the topic is that controversial that a proponent can not disclose its identity or what other reasons there could be for choosing anonymity; the only information provided on the author is that (s)he is a "retired Indian Railways official now involved with rural education". The author dismisses the environmental concerns in favour of a strong Andhra Pradesh state:

Even if there are apprehensions from environmentalists, the above should be good reasons to go ahead in making the Polavaram Project a success. Economist John

Maynard Keynes has said "In the long run, we are all dead!" Let us not waste the present. Maybe, policy makers in other well established states with well established capitals' are blessed with the luxury of squandering time in decision making and intellectual quibbling. But, sorry, we the citizens of a truncated Andhra Pradesh are not entitled to this privilege! We have been made to start all over again, including building a new capital! With the clock ticking away fast, do we Telugus still need to scratch our heads indecisively in perpetuity, as to whether river linking is a bad science or good economics? (The Times of India 2016g).

The author on the one side refers to a feeling of being a victim, the victim of having to "start all over again", of not being privileged, of being treated unfairly. By the Keynes quote used (s)he does not portray a look into the future, but rather presents a short sighted outlook of the here and now. The stand (s)he takes is a very clear one: the Polavaram Project is good economics and environmental concerns are less important or even superfluous. Earlier in the article (s)he points out that the Pattaseema Project needs to be build as the citizens of Andhra Pradesh "are prospective victims of 'upper river chauvinism'"(The Times of India 2016g). (S)he further refers to the "heavy price through the bifurcation of our state" as well as to Telangana's proposed barrages that will cause "Andhra Pradesh, the rice bowl of the country [to] turn into a salt creek with salinity seeping into both the Krishna and Godavari deltas" (The Times of India 2016g). Also in this matter a supposed victimhood of Andhra Pradesh's population is put into the spotlight. The author continues by brushing aside concerns by pointing out:

We cannot afford to lose any more time in the welter of intellectual debates raging for over four decades. There have been breaches in the Pattiseema. But is it the time for the public to press the panic button and join the chorus of fence sitting demagogues eagerly waiting for every such failure to give them ammunition to unseat the government?



Each failure is a learning experience in any bold new and pioneering effort towards self reliance, at least on the agricultural front that has always been the forte of Andhra Pradesh (The Times of India 2016g).

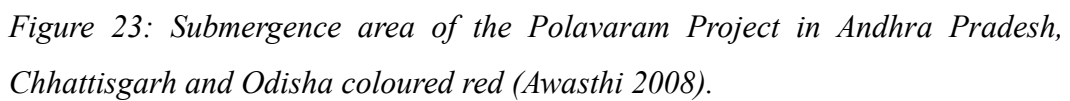
A strong local-patriotism, with the focus on the regional state, is predominant in his argumentation. According to the author, to achieve a strong regional state, environmental concerns can not be prioritised. The article portrays Andhra Pradesh in the role of a victim that now has a chance to finally achieve something that should not be destroyed by unnecessary environmental concerns, taking a fatalistic approach by declaring that “in the long run, we are all dead”.

As the discussed articles showed, it is mainly opponents that raise the question of the environmental aspects and many disconcerting aspects are referred to. The last article however pointed out that opposing perspectives also exist in the analysed documents. The tenor of that article is that environmental concerns can not be paramount if the state's self reliance is otherwise at risk. The next chapter will now consider an issue debated to a much larger extend: the inter-state disputes with neighbouring Chhattisgarh and Odisha arising from the Polavaram Project.

#### **2.3.4. Inter-State Disputes**

An important part of the discussion on the construction of the Polavaram Project resolves around the dispute with the affected neighbouring states: Odisha and Chhattisgarh. Disputes on the construction also exist between Andhra Pradesh and the newly formed state of Telangana, however they are less addressed. Before going into the more detailed analysis of the newspaper's and magazine's reporting, some background information on the foundations of the disputes will be provided.

In the chapter on the analysis of the inter-state disputes within the reporting on the



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(GWDT). Also the Polavaram Project was discussed at that time between the states of Andhra Pradesh, (of which since 2014 parts belong to the newly formed state of Telangana), Orissa (since 2011 Odisha) and Madhya Pradesh (which included Chhattisgarh, now an independent state, until 2000). As the tribunals are known for taking a very long period of time to reach agreements (cf. N. Singh 2011; R. B. Shah 1994; Iyer 1994), also the final report in the GWDT case, the GWDT Award, was agreed upon only in 1980. The agreement includes that the construction of the dam can not exceed a Full Reservoir Level (FRL) or Maximum Water Level (MWL) of +150 feet. Both Madhya Pradesh and Orissa agreed on submergence of their land up to that limit. Yet in the report it is pointed out that:

The Tribunal examined all these Agreements and it appeared that there was some difficulty in regard to maintaining FRL/MWL at +150 feet at the dam site and at the same time ensuring that the maximum submergence in the States of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh at Motu/Konta should not exceed R.L. +150 feet due to all effects including backwater effect of the Polavaram Project. The Tribunal took the view that this difficulty was capable of solution by taking proper safeguards to avoid excess submergence of the lands in the States of Madhya Pradesh and Orissa due to the construction of the Polavaram Dam (Water Resources Department, Government of Andhra Pradesh 1980, 3).

The solution presented within the GWDT Award was the construction of embankments. Constructed within the states of Madhya Pradesh and Orissa these were meant to ensure that submergence does not exceed the 150 feet agreed upon (cf. Water Resources Department, Government of Andhra Pradesh 1980). Initiated at a very early stage of construction planning, the GWDT, though a lengthy

procedure, at first sight seems to be a useful tool to seek solutions to disputes that could otherwise arise in future. Looking at the current situation, as the states of Odisha and Chhattisgarh reject the construction of the dam massively, its utility can however be questioned. In 2007 the government of Odisha filed a case in the Indian Supreme Court against the project clearances allocated by the Government of Andhra Pradesh, the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation (MoWR), the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF) and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (cf. Ministry of Water Resources 2014).

Odisha's arguments for reproaching the construction are 1) that the necessary clearances for the construction of the project, although sought for the Andhra Pradesh and now Telangana region, were never sought in Odisha and Chhattisgarh and 2) the mandatory public hearing was not held in Odisha and Chhattisgarh (cf. Sethi 2015). "Instead, the public hearing was conducted in Khammam district of Andhra Pradesh", Odisha's chief Minister Naveen Pattnaik complains (The Times of India 2013a). To Odisha's request, the Supreme Court ordered an inspection of the Polavaram Project by members of the Central Water Commission to find out if the dam is "carried out in terms of the GWDT Award" in 2011 (Sethi 2015). The reports resulting from the inspection state "that the planning of Polavaram Project and limited construction activities seen so far by the team at the Polavaram Dam site are in tune with approved project and GWDT provisions" (Sethi 2015). In 2011 the government of Chhattisgarh joined Odisha by filing a Supreme Court case itself "against clearances granted by various Central Agencies including MoWR and against proceeding with the construction of Polavaram Project by [the] Andhra Pradesh Government" (Ministry of Water Resources 2014). In the same year the MoEF acknowledged the demand to public hearings as a condition for the environmental clearance and stated that "due to non compliance [...] the MoEF has issued stop work order" (Ministry of Water

Resources 2014).

Construction therefore stopped for some time, however in April 2013 it was "decided to keep the stop work order in abeyance for a period of six months during which efforts be made to get the public hearings done in the States of Odisha and Chhattisgarh for the protective embankments" (Ministry of Water Resources 2014). The plans for the embankment include the construction of a 29 km long wall with a height of 10 to 30 meters. But, as *Down to Earth* pointed out in 2011, no assessment of the maximum flood levels has taken place, which would be necessary information in order to construct the embankments, neither has the forestland that would be used for the dyke construction been assessed so far (cf. Down to Earth 2011). *Down to Earth* also points out that the forest clearances that Andhra Pradesh received for the construction of the project in 2010 were only given under the condition that Odisha and Chhattisgarh will not be affected by resettlement and submergence. However also the construction of embankments would result in resettlement in Andhra Pradesh. The environmental clearance from 2005 did not include the embankments either (cf. Down to Earth 2011).

As constructions were taken up again, Odisha's Chief Minister Patnaik remarked in 2013 that "as the matter is sub judice in the apex court, it will be prudent to wait till the judgement is given as the project parameter and estimates may change" (The Times of India 2013a). The Supreme Court case is still pending until the time of writing this dissertation. However it does not seem to stop the construction work in a long run. After periods of construction freezes, the constructions were taken on time and again. In 2015 after a period of construction freeze in which once again the government of Andhra Pradesh did not conduct hearings as it was obliged to do, the Environment, Forest and Climate Change Minister Prakash Javadekar allowed Andhra Pradesh to proceed with the construction works. According to Sethi, publishing in the daily newspaper

Business Standard, "he did so at the personal request of Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, an ally of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and without informing Odisha and Chhattisgarh" (Sethi 2015). A letter from Javadekar to Naidu, which is quoted in the article, reads that "with the anticipation that the pending public hearing will be resolved through discussions and persistent engagement with Odisha and Chhattisgarh, my ministry has taken the decision to keep the 'stop-work order' in abeyance for a period of a year" (Sethi 2015). In response to this Baijendra Kumar, secretary to the Chhattisgarh Chief Minister, is cited saying "sometimes, they say four villages in our state will be submerged and sometimes they say 40. How can we know the exact situation till studies are done and public hearings are carried out in our state as well?" He further refers to the construction works being carried out "illegally" and wonders how the state can support such activities through tolerating the non-compliance with the law (Sethi 2015).

The way neither the Supreme Court nor the state takes action goes hand in hand with the findings, that:

Once an award [...] is handed over, it is almost never implemented [...] The ball keeps rolling from the Centre's 'court' to the judicial 'court' but hardly any action is taken on the ground. Both the Legislature as well as the Executive at the Centre has failed to act in a decisive manner. [...] The Executive in most cases has chosen to be more a mute spectator than an actor (Maitra 2007, 221).

Maitra's findings are to a very well applicable to the Polavaram Project. Though theoretically a useful tool in settling disputes, the GWDT has proven not to hinder conflicts arising and the centre does not seem to get involved but rather leaves it to the federal states to solve the issue among themselves. This section illustrated

that although laws are broken and Odisha and Chhattisgarh have called for a procedure in accordance with the existing regulations, the Supreme Court and the central government have only intervened to a very limited extend. After this general introduction to the dispute, the following section will now take a closer look at the way the dispute is being dealt with in the media coverage.

The largest share of the articles concerned report on statements of Odisha, and to a smaller extend Chhattisgarhi and Telangana, politicians voicing their opinion against the Polavaram Project, and on actions taken by the opposing states such as filing petitions or initiating protest actions such as hartals<sup>18</sup>. Examples for these two kind of articles are i.e. firstly *The Hindustan Time* reporting in 2009 that the central UPA [United Progressive Alliance] government is denounced by Odisha's Biju Janata Dal (BJD) party for giving clearances to the Polavaram Project (cf. Hindustan Times 2009a) and secondly an article from *The Times of India* in 2016 referring to the BJD announcing a demonstration "as part of its action plan to protest the project, which has been accorded a national project status" (The Times of India 2016f).

As the material on the inter-state disputes in the case of the Polavaram Dam is very extensive, I will concentrate on some aspects of the reporting as they are most striking and may provide some insightful aspects for the analysis. The following part will therefore concentrate on the questions of:

- *How is the displacement of Adivasi communities addressed by the*

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18 In the South Asian context the word "hartal" refer to a general strike, mostly used in the context of opposing political actions. Hartals, like hunger strikes, were also used as a method of protest in the Indian Independence Movement. They often involve the shutdown of shops, businesses, transport and schools. Kochanek and Hardgrave define a hartal as "a general strike involving the cessation of all public activity"(Hardgrave and Kochanek 2008, 242).

*opposing states?*

- *How do the affected states portray themselves in the dispute in relation to the central government, i.e. how is the federal structure addressed?*
- *How does the Andhra Pradesh government react to the critique via the media?*
- *Does the reporting take sides? How is the dispute being portrayed?*

To begin with the first question, the following part would like to address the way tribal interests are portrayed as being the driving force for the rejection of the Polavaram Project by Odisha's BJD government. As it overlaps with the later chapter on the media coverage of the social costs of the project, the following section will just highlight a few aspects of it. The need to include the aspect at this point derives from the fact that this is the main argument brought forward in the opposition, which is also seen ambivalently as for example A. S. Rao in a 2010 *India Today* article points out:

The BJD government in Orissa is strongly opposing the construction of the Polavaram dam on the ground that it would submerge land in the tribal areas of Malkangiri district in the state. It is another matter that the Naveen Patnaik-led dispensation, too, batted for a project (Vedanta<sup>19</sup>) that threatened to dislodge tribals (A. S. Rao 2010).

Also Raul in a 2014 article published in *The Hindu* questions the government's

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19 The article refers to the very controversial conflict about bauxite (a resource needed for the production of aluminium) mining by the company Vedanta and the Odisha Mining Corporation, which is owned by the state of Odisha, in Odisha's Niyamgiri Hills. It were especially the Dongria Kondh Adivasi communities that were to be displaced by the project, yet their protest was fruitful and the project was stopped (cf. Seetharaman 2018).



motive. In light of the fact that it is not the question of water-sharing that stands in the foreground of the debate, but the dam height as well as the large scale submergence, he asks: "Will the riparian States really oppose the project in the interest of the people of their State, or oppose it for the sake of opposing it?" (Raul 2014).

As seen from the two articles above, the intention of the BJD government is questioned and it is being suggested that Adivasi people's livelihood is used as a pretence to reject the project. The two discussed articles are however an exception. Usually the issue appears in the articles by giving voice to BJD members, such as in the following 2012 *Hindustan Times* article:

"The project will result in large scale submergence in Malkangiri, a tribal district affected by left wing extremism [...]" Patnaik said. He added that the construction of the project, for which no public hearing had been conducted in Malkangiri so far, would adversely affect the forestland and habitations of tribal people due to submergence likely to be caused by the project (Hindustan Times 2012).

Also a Press Trust of India newsfeed published in *India Today* similarly refers to BJD politicians asking for a stop order on the Polavaram project works, as it "would adversely affect the tribal people of Malkangiri district". Odisha's Law Minister Arun Kumar Sahoo is cited referring to Adivasi communities in 21 gram panchayats affected if by the construction (cf. India Today 2015e). A 2016 *The Hindu* article also refers to BJD leader Patro who once more uses the displacement of Adivasi communities as the argument for his party to oppose the project. He refers to 15 villages and 10 habitat subject to submergence leading to the displacement of more than 6,800 villagers, mostly from Adivasi communities. He is cited saying that "the project would [...] snatch livelihood from tribals" (The

Hindu 2016j). The phrasing of “snatching livelihood” is a very catchy, vivid image used to describe the issue of displacement and renders visible that there is more to it than sheer relocation of homes: the whole livelihood is at stake, including among others income sources, access to food and cultural practices.

Within the media coverage, it is mostly the dispute with Odisha that the analysed articles focus upon, yet there are also exceptions such as an article pointing to Chhattisgarhi perspectives when citing Chhattisgarhi Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) Amit Jogi referring to the "adverse affect on the lives of endangered tribal lives in Bastar region". He is further quoted "Whether in Bastar or in Odisha, the land where innocent tribal peoples live is equivalent to his mother" (India Today 2016o). Here it is also the notion of a powerless people that is being evoked by the use of the word "innocent". Also the idea that ones land is equivalent to one's mother points to an understanding of the communities as deeply rooted in spirituality. Though this is possibly true for affected communities, the narrative used is once more a narrative that does not point to a strong, aware, active community but rather evokes the image of the 'poor, backward tribals'. In the media coverage on the dispute it is noteworthy that none of the affected communities in Odisha or Chhattisgarh are given a voice: they do not speak for themselves but are being spoken about and spoken for; the discourse does not include them as active participants. The subsequent chapter on the coverage on social costs will also turn back on this issue once more.

With regard to the second question posed above on how the affected states portray themselves in the dispute in relation to the central government, i.e. how the federal structure is addressed, it can be said that especially Odisha uses the media attention to reproach the central government with favouring some states whilst bypassing others. There are several articles where this notion is articulated, such as in Mishra's article in *The Times of India* from 2014 which refers to BJD

president and Chief Minister of Odisha Naveen Patnaik accusing Narendra Modi and Rahul Gandhi of supporting the Polavaram project and "of having a 'negative attitude' towards Odisha" (S. Mishra 2014). The same statement also appeared in an article published in *India Today* (cf. India Today 2014c). Other BJD members join this line of argument, as for example a 2016 *The Times of India* article presents, in which the BJD is described calling the central governments' incurring of the financing of the Polavaram Project an "anti-Odisha" and "anti-tribal" move. BJD spokesperson Pratap Deb further adds: "Making such an announcement is like rubbing salt on the wounds of the people of Odisha" (The Times of India 2016e). Other articles also refer to further BJD politicians, such as Bisoyi's article published in *The Times of India* quoting BJD vice president Surya Narayan Patra who calls the appointment of national status to the project "very unfortunate" and states that "both Congress and BJP are against the interest of Odisha" (Bisoyi 2016a). Other BJD politicians issuing a similar critique on the central government are for example the then Odishan Minister for School Education Rabi Narayana Nanda (cf. A. S. Rao 2012), former BJD Minister Amar Prasad Satpathy (cf. India Today 2015c) and BJD General Secretary and now School Education Minister Debi Prasad Mishra (cf. India Today 2016a). The latter accuses the central government of taking decisions unilaterally without negotiations with Odisha and Chhattisgarh and of taking on a "partisan role in a federal structure". He further highlights the anger of the Odishan people. He directly points to the issue of the federal structure and refers to the feeling of his state being not considered sufficiently. This feeling seems to be a common one among the BJD. One further Minister cited on the issue is Industries Minister Debi Prasad Mishra asking: "All rules and laws of the land have been violated in order to support the Polavaram project. Is Odisha not part of India?" (India Today 2016b). Once again the notion of being left out is brought forward via the media.

In September 2016 *The Hindu* reported on another occasion where again the issue

of the federal structure of the state and thereby of an equal treatment of all the federal states as parts of the union, is addressed: "The [BJD] party alleged that the BJP-led central government was damaging federal structure of the country by neglecting rights of people of Odisha while promoting Polavaram as a national project" (The Hindu 2016m). On the occasion of signing a memorandum addressed to the President on unequal treatment of Odisha in projects such as the Polavaram Project, Patnaik assured that he will fight for the rights of his state and added: "We believe in the Federal spirit of the country but that should not be construed as our weakness" (Reddy 2016).

As seen from all of the above discussed articles, Odisha's ruling party, the BJD, utilizes a narrative of being left out, being treated unjustly by the Centre, in their fight against the Polavaram Project. The media reports on these statements to a large extent, however refrains from positioning itself for or against the Odishan state. Chhattisgarh or Telangana do not seem to use a similar strategy or at least their opposition does not appear in the media coverage to such an extent. Within the analysed data, the accusations made by the Odishan politicians in two cases resulted in reactions by the central government. The first one is reported upon in a 2016 *India Today* article in which Uma Bharti responds to the claims in the following manner:

Seeking to dispel Odisha governments apprehension that Andhra Pradesh unilaterally raised height of the Polavaram dam, the Centre today said it was committed to ensure that the Godavari Water Disputes Tribunal (GWDT) awards are not violated at any cost. "Whatever is said about the increase in the height of the Polavaram dam is just a rumour. The Andhra Pradesh government has not approached us for increasing the height of the dam. The Centre will strictly go by the prescribed height as mentioned there in the GWDT

award," Union Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation Minister Uma Bharti told reporters here. [...] About certain clearances allegedly given by the Centre favouring Andhra Pradesh, Bharti said, "The role of water resources ministry is to fund the project. We cannot interfere in the works of the Ministry of Environment and Forest" (India Today 2016c).

The ultimate responsibility for a possible discrimination against the Odishan state are thereby dismissed as not in the hands of her Ministry, but rather an issue of another Ministry, which she can not interfere with. It seems like an easy way out, that also others take, as visible from an article that refers to a response of a Minister from the union government to the accusations. Union Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas of India Dharmendra Pradhan therein admits that the Polavaram Project will "adversely impact Odisha and two other states" (India Today 2016p) and that he supports Odisha in their claims, however notes that "it is the compulsion of the central government to fund the project as Polavaram has been accorded the national project status under an act passed in this regard" (India Today 2016p) and further blames "the erstwhile UPA-led government at the Centre for approval of the project in the first place" (India Today 2016p). While giving his sympathies to the state, he does not take any responsibility but instead blames the previous government.

But how does the Andhra Pradesh government react to the charges? Compared with the Odisha's politicians prominence in the media reporting on the issue, the data material shows that the Andhra Pradesh government mainly refrains from commenting on the dispute, with very few exceptions. One of them is an exchange between Odisha's Chief Minister Patnaik and Andhra Pradesh's then Chief Minister Konijeti Rosaiah on the issue of conducting public hearings in Odisha from 2010 that was published in *Hindustan Times*. While, according to the

article, Patnaik points out that the hearings "have to" take place in Odisha, Rosaiah "ruled out [the] possibility of conducting any such exercise in the state" as Odisha's opposition to the project according to him is "not valid", even though the conduction of the hearings was one of the conditions imposed on Andhra Pradesh by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forest (Hindustan Times 2010c). This exchange between the two Chief Ministers is also reported on by Chauhan in *Hindustan Times* in the following way:

Andhra Pradesh chief minister K Rosaiah has refused to hold public consultations in Orissa and Chhattisgarh — a mandatory environment condition to start the Polavaram dam project — saying the respective state governments should do it. Orissa and Chhattisgarh have already refused to conduct the hearings, saying it is the job of project proponent [...] "You will appreciate that in our federal set-up, specific functions such as holding of public hearings had to be performed by respective states. Andhra cannot hold public hearings either in Orissa or Chhattisgarh," Rosaiah said in a confidential letter to environment minister Jairam Ramesh. The ministry had issued a notice to the state government seeking explanation for not conducting the public hearings as mandated in the environment clearance (Chauhan 2010a).

One more such exchange on the issue of the public hearings was reported on in 2011. The article refers to a letter by Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Raman Singh, addressing that:

Increasing the height would lead to huge submergence of land area in Dantewada as compared to environment clearance condition that only four villages will be affected. The four-page letter also says that Chhattisgarh was never consulted before taking the decision and such

suo motto decision can complicate the naxal problem in the state. He also said the Andhra government has failed to conduct public hearing in the affected areas despite several requests. Orissa has also lodged a similar complaint. Public hearing is required, in 12 villages in the two states, as per the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) rules. As, the state government failed to conduct public hearing the ministry issued a notice to Andhra Pradesh in November 2010 but it is yet to decide on the issue. Andhra government, in its reply, expressed its inability accusing the two state governments of not cooperating in getting the hearing done (Chauhan 2011).

The issue of the not held public hearings continues until the time of writing this dissertation. However, no such statements by the Andhra Pradesh government can be found in the considered newspaper and magazine articles subsequent to the ones quoted above.

Referring back to the questions posed in the beginning of this subchapter, the preceding examination has shown that in the media coverage of the inter-state dispute:

- 1) The displacement of the Adivasi communities is used especially by the Odishan BJD government as their main argument in opposing the project. Some reports however critically question the party's intention in doing so.
- 2) The relationship between federal states and the central government is an aspect that especially the BJD uses. It continuously points out that the state of Odisha is treated unfairly by the centre, that the centre favours Andhra Pradesh. The media reports on these statements to a large extend, however refrains from positioning itself for or against the Odishan state. Chhattisgarh or Telangana however refrain

from that strategy, or at least do not appear in the media using it. The central government when responding to the accusations does not take responsibility but rather shuffles it off to other Ministries or previous governments.

3) Andhra Pradesh hardly reacts to the accusations, and chooses to keep silent.

4) Overall it can be said, that within the dispute the authors of newspapers and magazines do not pick sides, but rather report quite balanced on the conflict.

After having considered the way the inter-state dispute is being dealt with in the newspaper and magazine coverage, the following subchapter will now turn towards the topic of irrigation and agriculture.

### **2.3.5. Irrigation & Agriculture Narratives**

The increase of available water for irrigation purposes, and thereby helping the farmers in the region, is the Polavram Project's proponents most used argument in favour of it. This aspect is mentioned in many of the concerned articles, for example in Nichenametla's contribution to *Hindustan Times* in which it is pointed out that "the major benefit of this interlinking would be to the farmers and people of Rayalaseema" (Nichenametla 2015). Rayalaseema together with Coastal Andhra forms the state of Andhra Pradesh since the former third part of Telangana became an independent federal state in 2014. The Krishna delta, which receives water through the canal connecting Godavari to Krishna, is part of the Rayalaseema area. Water is already being transferred as the canal construction is completed and the intermediate Pattiseema lift irrigation scheme provides for the flow of water from Godavari to Krishna until the Polavaram Dam is in place.

It is therefore especially the benefits for the Krishna delta's farmers that reporting



relates to, such as in an article by Dash published in *India Today*: "Andhra Pradesh has taken the historic step of interlinking its two major rivers, Godavari and Krishna, a development that is being seen as a boon for farmers of Krishna delta who face intense water scarcity" (Dash 2015). The Pattiseema lift irrigation scheme is described by Chief Minister Naidu as a "'prestigious' and 'historic' [project] which will irrigate Rayalaseema's farmland" (India Today 2015a). A year before, Naidu pointed out that "the State was best suited for implementation of inter-linking of Godavari and Krishna rivers that could address problems faced by farmers in general and specially those in drought-hit Rayalaseema" (The Hindu 2014c).

Naidu is very prominent in the reporting on irrigation and agricultural benefits and is continuously quoted in the media reaching out to farmers. In another article published by *The Hindu* in 2015 he is quoted saying "the 40 tmcft<sup>20</sup> from small streams and 80 tmcft from Pattiseema Lift Irrigation project can be used for irrigating 13 lakh acres in Krishna delta" (The Hindu 2015b). Also on the issue, Rao in *The Hindu* reported that Naidu "addressing a public meeting organised to mark the completion of the Pattiseema project" said that by the project "East and West Godavari districts would be able to raise two crops [instead of currently one crop per year, note by the author] and the entire Krishna district would be stabilised" (G. V. Rao 2016a). Also on Pattiseema, *The Times of India* quoted him saying: "Pattisam [used interchangeably to the name Pattiseema, note by the author] scheme has been completed in a record time of just one year. By interlinking Godavari and Krishna, crops in the Krishna Delta region are saved by timely supply of (8.8 tmcft) water" (The Times of India 2016a). Naidu also argues economically by pointing out that "We spent Rs 1,300 crore on Pattisam but the

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20 Tmcft stands for "thousand million cubic feet". One tmcft equals 28,000,000 m<sup>3</sup>.

crops saved in the first year itself were worth Rs 2,500 crore" (The Times of India 2016a). Similarly he combines the aspect of helping the farmers and bringing prosperity to the region by pointing out "We are sure to complete the project with the help of locals and irrigate lakhs of acres for the prosperity of farmers and others in many districts" (The Hindu 2016d).

Next to Naidu, there are also other government members pointing to the commitment to improve conditions for the Krishna delta's farmers, such as Water Resources Minister Devineni Umamaheswara Rao, who is quoted in *The Hindu*: "The State government is committed to interlinking of rivers and providing irrigation to barren lands spread in an extent of one crore acres" (The Hindu 2016f). Finance Minister Arun Jaitley stresses that "investments in irrigation projects for agriculture [...] led to social satisfaction and economic prosperity" (Dhoot 2016). In the article by Dhoot published in *The Hindu* Jaitley is further quoted with reference to the Polavaram Project: "Using the water resource of the country to its optimal so that the farmers can benefit is one of our prime goals" (Dhoot 2016). Also *The Times of India* reported on the event at which Jaitley spoke. It was organised on the occasion of the centre releasing funds to the Polavaram Project and also visited by Chief Minister Naidu, Water Minister Bharti and Urban Development Minister Naidu (cf. The Times of India 2016m).

Kumar in an article published in *The Hindu* refers to Irrigation Minister Devineni Umamaheswara Rao and cites him saying that the early completion of Pattiseema lift irrigation project "is an example of Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu's commitment in making the State drought-free [...]. The Chief Minister stood by his word in completing the project and saving the interests of farmers" (S. S. Kumar 2015b). Also on the issue of irrigation, an article in *The Hindu* published in August 2016 points out that the Polavaram Right Canal "has become the lifeline for Krishna delta farmers" (The Hindu 2016h). The pro-Polavaram article further

reports that the Pattiseema lift irrigation scheme is considered "the panacea to both irrigation and drinking water problems" and that "the government is leaving no stone unturned to make the linkage of the Krishna and the Godavari a success [...] to irrigate the lands of Rayalaseema farmers as promised" (The Hindu 2016h).

As seen in this section, it is especially *The Hindu* who runs in the forefront of reporting on the irrigation benefits of the Polavaram Project. The wording used, such as in the last example ("lifeline for farmers", "panacea to irrigation and drinking water problems", "government is leaving no stone unturned to keep their promise"), shows that the reporting therein is very pro-government. The use of phrases such as "lifeline" will be considered in more detail again in the section on political discourses on the Polavaram Project, as it is one of the main catchphrases used by Naidu in his narration of the project.

The articles render visible who political stakeholders address: claiming to achieve prosperity and irrigation potential for the farmers, is a promise to a specific section of agricultural businesses: those potentially important for the agriculture-based GDP, the large-scale farmers. The farmers suffering from the construction by displacement, those living of subsistence agriculture, do not seem to be included in that narrative. Critics are mainly absent in the reporting on irrigation and agriculture aspects of the Polavaram Project, with one exception in which Himanshu Thakkar is quoted in an article by Awasthi published in *Down to Earth*. He points out that that a large share of the area meant to benefit is already under irrigation: "If more than 85 per cent area is irrigated, there is no justification for the project" (Awasthi 2008). The article yet puts this view into perspective by subsequently writing that "data shows that due to over-exploitation, groundwater in the region is fast depleting and surface irrigation can help" (Awasthi 2008). The appearance of critical voices in case of the irrigation and agriculture issue differs for example from the discourse on social costs, where they do appear to a larger

extend as will be visible in the following subchapter attending to the issue.

### **2.3.6. Discourse on Social Costs**

In the following part the collected data on social costs will be discussed. Who is given a voice in this debate and how is the issue articulated? Almost all of the articles discussing the issue of displacement do so in a critical way, expounding the problems of large scale rehabilitation. Out of 247 collected documents on the Polavaram Project, 62 documents relate to the issue of displacement. Who is quoted, directly or indirectly, on the issue of displacement? Who's voices are heard?

One very important group comprises politicians from Odisha, mainly from the ruling regional social democratic BJD. In their statements they especially refer to the displacement of communities in Odisha due to the backlog of water, as was already rendered visible in the chapter above on the inter-state disputes. They utilise the necessary resettlement in their state as one of their main arguments against the Polavaram Project. In this way it is for example Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik (cf. Hindustan Times 2009a, 2010c, 2012), or party leader in the Lok Sabha A.S. Sethi (cf. Hindustan Times 2010a), who are quoted. Both of them claim the project to be 'anti-tribal' as it especially effects Adivasi population.

In other articles it is several Odishan State Ministers speaking at an anti-Polavaram rally (cf. Hindustan Times 2010b), or State General Secretary Narendra Swain (cf. The Hindu 2014b) that are referred to. *India Today* quotes BJD spokesperson Surya Narayan Patro after a press conference in an article in September 2016, so did Bisoyi in *The Times of India* and *The Hindu* (India Today 2016l; Bisoyi 2016a; The Hindu 2016j). *The Times of India* refers to BJD member and Odisha Commerce and Transport Minister Ramesh Chandra Majhi saying:

"The project will submerge at least 15 revenue villages and 10 hamlets in Motu tehsil. During the rains, over 150 villages and around 40,000 acres of agricultural land in Malkangiri district will be flooded" (The Times of India 2016h). Also President of the BJD youth wing Sanjay Das Burma is quoted referring to the project's "impact on the life and livelihood of the tribals (Bisoyi 2016b). Similarly BJD Tribal Development Minister Lal Bihari Himirika is given a voice: "We demand immediate stop to construction of Polavaram Project. We have also demanded reduction of dam height. The party has also sought the Presidents intervention to protect the interest of tribal people of south Odisha" (India Today 2016m). To a much lesser extend there is also resistance by Chhattisgarh politicians that makes it into the news, such as Congress MLA Amit Jogi who speaks of a displacement of over 45,000 people by the project in Chhattisgarh. He points out that "areas inhabited by Dorla and Koya, both protected tribes, will get submerged, putting their very survival at risk" (India Today 2016e). He and other tribal MLA's are again quoted in a *The Times of India* article a few months later (cf. The Times of India 2016b). *India Today* later in the year 2016 refers to him and quotes him again on the protest against the effects of the Polavaram Project on the life of Adivasi communities in Chhattisgarh (India Today 2016o).

Next to the Odisha and Chhattisgarh politicians, other people quoted from the political sphere are for example former Power Secretary E A S Sarma, who said "For every five acres (2.02 hectares) that will be irrigated by the project, one tribal family will be displaced" (Mahapatra 2011), and Punam Singanadora, a former MLA who lives in Polavaram and is quoted with the following words: "Overnight, the tribal people will lose their rights and privileges granted by the Constitution to scheduled areas. Also, the President's permission is needed to shift people from

scheduled areas to non-scheduled areas<sup>21</sup>. Have they got it already?" (Mahapatra 2011).

Also Yuvajana, Shramika, Rythu Congress Party (YSR Congress: "Youth, Labour and Farmer Congress Party") president Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy is given voice in the newspaper articles: "He said that the government had "grabbed" lands belonging to tribal people in the name of Pattiseema, and accused Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu of favouring contractors. Mr. Jaganmohan Reddy further demanded that compensation be given to the tribal people as per the new R&R [Rehabilitation & Resettlement] package" (Bhaskar 2016b). Also *The Times of India* in December 2016 quotes him:

The government is siding with the contractors and neglecting the tribals. This shows the mindset of Naidu, [...] The Polavaram Project is the lifeline of the people of the state but at the same time tribals who have sacrificed their land and livelihood should be compensated adequately. [...] Despite several representations Naidu has been turning a deaf ear to the problems of the tribals (The Times of India 2016l).

The president of a YSR Congress district unit adds: "The Cabinet is discussing the issue of rate revision to the contractors time and again, but it has not even discussed once about the evacuees" (The Hindu 2016k). Similarly a former MP from Rajamahendravaram takes the same line: "the State government is giving step-motherly treatment to the evacuees of the Polavaram Project. Interestingly, it

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21 A so-called scheduled area is a marked out region with a predominantly Adivasi population in which the Indian constitution guarantees special protection and rights to the Adivasi communities. The dissertation will refer back to concept in Chapter 3.1. "Displacing Adivasi Communities".

is trying its best to protect the interests of the contractors, for whom it has taken the responsibility of the project execution" (The Hindu 2016k).

Members of AIKMS, an Indian Peasant Union associated with the Communist Party of India (CPI), are also cited several times. One example is an article in *The Hindu* in 2015:

The AIKMS alleges that Polavaram Project would lead to loss of land, forest and livelihood for around three lakh tribals including those of Odisha. Although projected as an irrigation project, the real purpose of this project is to divert water of Godavari river for thermal power plants, nuclear power plant, SEZ, chemical and petrochemical industries coming up in the proposed coastal corridor of Andhra Pradesh (The Hindu 2015 / for further references to the Akhil Bharat Kisan Mazdoor Sabha cf. (India Today 2016r; The Times of India 2016k).

Also members of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI (M)) are raising their voices on the displacement issue and are reflected in the newspaper reporting. Examples here are CPI (M) State Secretary P. Madhu who is quoted from a letter to Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu in *The Hindu* in December 2018 (The Hindu 2016r) or CPI (M) members that are quoted in *India Today* in September 2016: ""The excess height of the Polavaram Dam will cause huge loss for the people of Odisha,"[...] The party said lack of water for Polavaram Project would cause displacement of several tribal families who have got little benefit under the Forest Rights Act" (India Today 2016n). In a December 2016 *The Hindu* article it is also a CPI (M) District Secretary that is cited (The Hindu 2016t). A few months earlier an article relates to former MP from Bhadrachalam from the CPI (M), Midiyam Babu Rao, who again argues:

The assessment for the relief and rehabilitation was done in 2004-05 and the government is claiming that the relief will be provided basing on those statistics only. But, the same government has revised the contract rates to the year 2015 on a war-footing and implementing it with retrospective effect. It is clearly showing that the government is in favour of the contractors, but not that of the evacuees (The Hindu 2016k).

Other people quoted on the issue include economist Pulla Rao who "described the construction of the dam as an epic disaster" (A. S. Rao 2010), or activist Prafulla Samantaray that says that "The state government's fight against the project is only to gain political benefits. The state government is not fighting against the project in true spirit. It has failed in taking proper administrative and legal steps against the project" (The Times of India 2016k). There are also experts from NGOs or civil society organisations quoted as for example members of the Academy for Mountain Environics and the Mines, Minerals & People Network (cf. Awasthi 2008). Interestingly there are no quotes presented from the central government on the issue, most likely as they refrain from commenting on the issue. The only exception is Union Tribal Affairs Minister Jual Oram, an MP from Odisha, who says: "The state's BJD government is just shedding crocodile tears for tribals. I will do whatever is beneficial for the tribal population likely to be affected by Polavaram Project" (India Today 2015).

However, another group that does regularly appear is that of tribal leaders, activists and spokespersons of Adivasi organizations. Karem Siramayya, a tribal leader, is for example quoted: "Many villages would be submerged. The tribes are being forced to shift to far-off places such as Charla and Bayyaram, where there are no irrigation facilities" (A. S. Rao 2010). Also *Down to Earth* highlights the



perspective of tribal activists and effected villagers in an article titled "Telangana betrays its tribals", which was published in March 2014 (Down to Earth 2014). Another example derives from the reporting in *The Times of India* on the Occasion of the United Nations International Day of the World's Indigenous People:

For Khammam-based P Buchaiah, state general secretary of Adivasi Naikpod Sangam, one of the groups likely to be affected by the Polavaram Dam, celebrating the World Tribal Day is the last thing on his mind. "Our people are worried about the impending dark future. Out of the soon-to-be-oustees in seven mandals of Khammam, only 30% have pattas [record of land ownership, note by the author] while the rest have lands assigned by the government in the past. There is now talk that those owning assigned lands would not get compensation but would be given non-forest land in plain areas" (The Times of India 2014e).

The article continues by pointing out:

Displacement was also the moot point at Indira Park, where more than a thousand tribals, representing Kondareddis, Koyas, Naikpods (from Telangana), Mundas and Marias (Odisha) and a few others from Chhattisgarh under the aegis of People Against Polavaram, gathered for a day-long protest. In attendance was Odisha's Malkangiri MLA Manas Madkani along with colourfully dressed tribals. "Polavaram is anti-tribals as they are the majority likely to be affected in Telangana, Odisha and Chhattisgarh states," said Sunnam Venkataramana, who is now spearheading the movement by coordinating with other tribal groups (The Times of India 2014e).

The effected villagers do also get a chance to speak. So for example in *Hindustan Times* in 2010 in which a letter by affected villagers is quoted (cf. Chauhan 2010b), or in 2015 in an article by Bhaskar giving a voice to a "tribal farmer" (cf. Bhaskar 2015). *Down to Earth* in 2011 published an article that included a deeper investigation within the affected villages and quotes its residents such as for example Rajakrishna Reddy of Kurturu village: "If one knows only how to fish and gather forest produce for a living, there is no other place where one can survive" (Mahapatra 2011). In a similar article by *The Hindu* 2014 Katakala Pratap, a local resident, is quoted:

Almost all the habitations of Kondareddi tribes will get submerged under the Polavaram [...]. No one can reside on a hilltop habitation surrounded by water and it implies that the entire Konda Reddi tribal people had to move out of their natural habitat severing their age old bond with the native place (Sridhar 2014).

To conclude, it can be said that politicians as well as activists, Adivasi leaders as well as affected communities are reflected in the reporting on displacement in the case of the Polavaram Dam. However, the issue is only addressed by opponents of the project. The proponents refrain from commenting. The analysis has also shown that is hardly central government's or Andhra Pradesh's politicians appearing in the media, but the large scale displacement is mainly met with resistance by Odishan politicians. If linked to a de facto interest in the well-being of the Adivasi communities or if used as an opportunistic argument against the Polavaram Dam is anyone's guess, especially as they seem to be only concerned with the displacement taking place in their state. The great absences of those pushing and supporting the project from the debate on the displacement can however be seen as the main finding of this section.

### 2.3.7. Political Narratives

In the reporting on the Polavaram Project, it is especially Andhra Pradesh's Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu (in office 1995-2004, and again since 2014, leader of the regional centre-right Telugu Desam Party), who dominates the discourse. Though absent from the discussion of displacement, he takes a very prominent role in the debate of many other issues concerning the Polavaram Project and strongly pushes forward with the implementation. His name is mentioned in 103 out of the 247 documents, therefore mentioned in 42% of all the collected articles. Prime Minister Narendra Modi by contrast is mentioned in 35 documents (14% of the documents) and Minister of Water Resources of India Uma Bharti is mentioned in 14 documents (6% of the documents mention her).

Naidu as a regional politician therefore takes on a much more prominent role in the debate than the central government, though a national project. The articles reveal how closely his figure is intertwined with the project and how his rhetoric and choice of words influences the perception of the project. The political importance of the project is however not missed and for example highlighted in an article by Sankar published in *The Hindu*, in which it is called a "prestigious national project" (Sankar 2016) or by Uma Bharti who is cited describing the project as a "national pride" (Reddy 2016).

The two major catchphrases Naidu repeatedly is quoted using are that of creating the "lifeline" of the state (cf. i.e. The Hindu 2016a; India Today 2016b, 2016i) and of making Andhra Pradesh a "drought-free" or "drought-proof" state (cf. i.e. (S. S. Kumar 2016; S. S. Kumar and Reddem 2016; G. V. Rao 2016b; Sankar 2015; The Hindu 2016o). Both are strong images, the idea of being a drought-free state sounding just as promising as the lifeline seems vital. Analysing the newspaper and magazine reporting renders visible how this wording is adopted by other

politicians and by reporters. The idea of a "lifeline" for example inscribes itself into the discourse, and becomes rather undisputed general knowledge. In March 2016 an article from *The Hindu* for example reads: "Leader of Opposition in Assembly Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy has alleged that the government compromised on the Polavaram Project, considered lifeline for Andhra Pradesh, in taking up the Pattiseema lift irrigation scheme" (The Hindu 2016b). The insertion of a sub-clause indicates the transition of Naidu's wording, and its relating imaginaries, towards a kind of general knowledge: Naidu and his government were therefore successful in making his / their phrasing to a phrasing automatically associated with the project and thereby shaping its discursive positioning. Also critics of the project and opposition members come to use the same wording. In December 2016 *The Times of India* quotes opposition leader Y. S. Jaganmohan Reddy: "The Polavaram Project is the lifeline of the people of the state but at the same time tribals who have sacrificed their land and livelihood should be compensated adequately" (The Times of India 2016l). The idea of the "lifeline" seems to be uncontested by now. The phrase can also be found in relation to Union Minister Venkaiah Naidu who is quoted: "It [the Polavaram Project] is the lifeline of Andhra Pradesh" (India Today 2016i).

Other phrases used by Naidu also depict his position in framing the Polavaram Project as well as his political involvement. The promises, that he connects to the project and that the newspapers take up and quote, are high, as the following quotations by Naidu as published in *The Hindu* indicate: "The completion of Polavaram would make Andhra Pradesh one of the best in the country" (G. V. Rao 2016a), "We are sure to complete the project with the help of locals and irrigate lakhs of acres for the prosperity of farmers" (The Hindu 2016d), "History has been made. It is going to find a mention in the Guinness Book of Records as my government has completed the river-linkage project in just 320 days. To achieve this, one needs strong commitment and vision, which only my government has"

(Bhaskar 2016a). In the last quote Naidu refers to the completion of the Pattaseeme Lift Irrigation Scheme, that indeed was included in the Limca Book of Records, an Indian version of the Guinness Book of Records, in 2017 (cf. Ranjan 2017). River-linking becomes the epitome of his political actions. Also when speaking on the building of the new Andhra Pradesh capital Amaravati, he states:

The location where the foundation stone will be laid should be vaastu-compliant and a picturesque spot. In future, it will become the nerve centre of Andhra Pradesh, signifying river-linking and a spot where soil from all mandals will be mixed with the soil of Amaravati (Sen 2015).

"Vaastu-compliant" relates to the architectural principles of Vaastu, and could be described as a Hindu version of the perhaps better known Chinese Feng-Shui principles. This is not the only time Naidu relates to religious elements in the context of river interlinking – it is rather another prominent reoccurring theme.

In December 2016 Naidu's government, according to the reporting of *The Hindu* ahead of the event, aimed at making the beginning of the concrete works at the dam site "a memorable event". Over 100,000 farmers, Telugu Desam Party activists and others were invited. "A minimum of a 1,000 buses from all over the State are expected to converge on the venue. [...] Arrangements are being made to serve meals for 50,000 people and special cultural programmes will be performed" (The Hindu 2016u). At this function, *The Hindu* reported later on:

Mr. Naidu spared no effort to make it a grand success. The Chief Minister put concrete at the auspicious time of 1.59 p.m. amid chanting of Vedic hymns, and called upon the people to pray to Gods for smooth execution of the project. He even administered to them a

pledge to that effect. "Farmers have made a great sacrifice by giving nearly 31,000 acres of land for construction of the capital city. They have made a similar noble gesture for building this dam. The nation will never forget their contribution to development", Mr. Naidu asserted (Subba Rao 2016).

The reporting demonstrates nation-building and development narratives and the quoted speech resembles Nehru's often quoted words ('if you are to suffer, you should suffer in the interest of the country' (cf. i.e. Roy 1999)) that he used in a speech in 1948 speaking to villagers that were going to be displaced by the construction of the Hirakud Dam. However Naidu only addresses farmers in his speech and refrains from mentioning the issue of resettlement and the fate of those displaced. Speaking of acres of land that are being provided by farmers for the project, gives the impression that only uninhabited agriculture land has been used and excludes the villages and whole communities, forest dwellers, that have been or will be displaced for the sake of the project. Their "contribution to development" is excluded in his rhetoric. Furthermore, the article highlights the importance of religious rituals in the context of large scale development projects. Other articles also report on this interconnection of religion and presumably highly modernist projects, as for example Kumar in *The Hindu* in 2015:

Farmers and elected reps took a celebratory dunking in the water as the Godavari entered [...] Krishna district at the village of Pallerlamudi on the way to her tryst with her sister river. The interlinking of the Godavari and the Krishna, a pet project of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, is thus one step closer to reality. Irrigation Minister Devineni Umamaheswara Rao, Eluru MP Maganti Babu, Denduluru MLA Chintamaneni Prabhakar and others performed special pujas on the banks of the Polavaram Right Main Canal at the

village. "It's a long-pending dream and it is finally going to be realised," said Mr. Umamaheshwara Rao (S. S. Kumar 2015a).

Similarly *The Times of India* reports on how the Pattiseema lift irrigation scheme "also aims at letting pilgrims have a hassle-free holy dip during Krishna Pushkarams<sup>22</sup>" (The Times of India 2016d) and Srinivas in *The Hindu* writes:

Speaking to the media after launching the Krishna Pushkarams by taking a holy dip in the Krishna at Durga Ghat, Mr. Naidu said the government would study the linking of rivers in other States and adopt methods that suited the conditions in Andhra Pradesh. [...] "I prayed to the river goddess to give good crops, bless the people and give them good health," Mr. Naidu said. The government would release more water into the Krishna and welcomed the devotees to attend the festival in large numbers (Srinivas 2016).

To stress the importance of and pride in the Polavaram Project even further Naidu, according to the articles, announced the opening of a museum at the Polavaram construction site. He said: "This is a historical journey and it needs to be documented. The government plans to set up a museum there" (The Hindu 2016o). The link to the engineering profession, as in decades before was also very much stressed by Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi, is also made by him:

The Chief Minister suggested that the departments concerned should

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22 Krishna Pushkarams or Krishna Pushkaralu is a Hindu religious festival in honour of the river Krishna taking place every twelve years in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Telangana. It includes a bath in the holy waters of the Krishna river as well as religious ceremonies at the river banks.

arrange field trips for engineering students to the project site. He directed the officials to document the work to preserve its historical significance and speed up proposed museum (The Hindu 2016s).

Another finding is that the use of new technologies is highlighted in the reporting to a great extent. Naidu's weekly review meetings on the Polavaram Project are repeatedly reported upon (cf. The Hindu 2016l, The Hindu 2016m, Sankar 2016), and new technologies seem to take on a vital role in these inspections as can be seen in the following citation:

The Chief Minister [reviews] the work in progress on Polavaram Project site through 'virtual inspection' using drones [...]. On the occasion, Mr. Naidu asked the officials to procure drones, CCTVs and Lidar technology for inspecting the works. He also wanted the officials to design a website on Polavaram Project and upload information on day to day basis. Internet connectivity would be provided at the project through the fibre grid, he said' (The Hindu 2016l).

Also *The Times of India* reports on new technologies used at the dam construction site such as facial recognition for the access to the project site, and newest surveillance camera technology (cf. The Times of India 2016j). Similarly *The Hindu* reports in October 2016:

Mr. Naidu said the data about the daily work done should be uploaded into the computers by the end of the day not later than 9 p.m. The officials should cross check the data next day using a drone which would be kept at the work site and also the closed circuit television cameras installed at the project site. Using the data and video footage,



the officials should explain to him the progress at the weekly review meetings, the Chief Minister said. He said best use of technology should be made in executing the project. It should be a study project for students who would be able to learn how to use the latest in technology, he said (The Hindu 2016o).

Technology seems to play a vital role in this development endeavour. The way the Chief Minister emphasizes technology use, creates the impression that an image of a modern state using the latest high-tech and that looks out into the future is supposed to be portrayed. Besides the reporting evokes the association of spreading the “scientific temper”, as discussed in Chapter 1, as also an aspect of educating the youth is included.

To conclude on the political discourse surrounding the Polavaram Project, it can be said that Andhra Pradesh's Chief Minister Naidu plays a major role in shaping it. Using the imaginary of a "lifeline", and of a state that the project will make "drought-free", evokes the ideas of benefits for the whole population of the state. He also uses religious rituals to underline the importance of the project. The potency of the developmental imagination, the idea of technological solutions to social problems, still seems to be strong. In how far the promises of development made are true also for those being subject to the displacement by the Polavaram Project, will be looked at in the subsequent chapter. Local narratives and discourses on the Polavaram Project as well as the implication for those affected will be considered. Yet before moving towards it, the following subchapter will provide a comparison between the discourses on the NRLP, the Ken-Betwa Project and the Polavaram Project to draw some first conclusions.

#### **2.4. Discourse lines within the Media Debates: A Comparison**

After the preceding analysis of the three cases, this subchapter aims at comparing the observations made. This will be done in the order of the issues previously addressed, starting off with environmental debates.

On this issue, there are similarities as well as differences with regard to the three analysed cases to be found. In the case reporting on the NRLP in general, many articles take a very critical stance which is highlighted by the usage of words such as "suicidal folly", "recipe for disaster", "pie-in-the-sky scheme" and by speaking of the "massive environmental impacts". Considering the environmental debates on the NRLP in the media it must be kept in mind, that India has a wide array of also internationally recognised environmental movements, which surely influenced the way such projects are and can now be debated in the public and the media sphere. These movements often use Gandhian non-violent protesting methods which seems to add to their popularity. For a long time movements such as the Chipko Andolan, a forest conservation movement which began in the 1970s which also addresses the right of the Adivasi communities and is often referred to in connection to ecofeminist movements, have influenced how environmental issues are being perceived within and outside of India. Other movements such as the Stop Tehri Project Committee or the Narmada Bachao Andolan directly work on issues related to large scale hydro projects, dam constructions and the displacement of population by these. The movements surely paved the way for the media to nowadays address environmental issues in such poignancy. In the case of the reporting on the NRLP it is interesting to note that the critique is mostly articulated in combination with a critique of the scheme's social costs.

The proponents that are quoted on the other side use different strategies such as degrading opponents and their concerns or convincing the audience that the

environment concerns are negligible. Uma Bharti is the most quoted proponent on the issue.

This is also the case of the Ken-Betwa Project's media debate. Bharti takes on a leading role in fighting off environment concerns and therein deploys different strategies. She aims at portraying herself as doing all she can to help the people, as an environment lover, and makes the project to a very personal issue by i.e. threatening to go on hunger strike if the project is delayed. She issues contradicting statements including that people are more important than tigers and therefore the consequences for the Panna Tiger Reserve are unpleasant but inevitable side effects, whereas in another interviews she states that the project is actually benefiting the tigers. Overall, the reporting on environment concerns in the case of the Ken-Betwa Project focuses mainly on the tigers. From the opponent's side the articles mainly quote wildlife experts. Furthermore the question of the actual availability of "surplus" water is raised and irregularities within the negotiations for environmental clearances are scrutinized. It can be further added, that this section also rendered visible how opponents fear to be branded anti-national when speaking out against the project: the notion of the nation state being involved in a project taking place in a local situation is very prominent. The framework used is one referring to the nation state, not to the federal state or even smaller units such as on district level.

This differs strongly from the situation in Andhra Pradesh, where the local entity, the federal state is much more referred to than the nation state. This might also explain why Uma Bharti as central water minister is not included in the discourse on the Polavaram Dam. The analysis has shown that critical voices exist and the environment impact and the consequences for flora and fauna as well as the questionable "surplus water" assumption are pointed out in the media coverage, yet the issue mainly remains a sideline in most of the articles. The only

proponent's voice covered in the reporting is that of an anonymous author promoting that environment issues can not stand in the way of development. As will again be discussed later in this chapter with regard to the political involvement, Bharti's absence in Andhra Pradesh can also be seen as linked to another strong political figure in Andhra Pradesh, namely Naidu, pushing the project which results in a) less of a platform for Bharti to promote her ideas and herself i.e. in Andhra Pradesh she would not be able to stage herself as much as the 'heroine helping the poor' as she is able to do in Uttar Pradesh, which might make it less appealing to her to actually get involved, and b) a de facto much smaller role of the central state in the implementation of the Polavaram Project as most of it is done without further involvement of the centre.

In the case of the reporting on inter-state conflicts arising from the NRLP, the articles point to the conflictual relationship with Bangladesh, which fears to loose water resources if the water is dammed upstream. Most reporting however concentrates on the conflicts between neighbouring states within India and in that context on states refusing to give their consent to the NRLP. Example for water disputes mentioned are disagreements between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, not only on the NRLP but also on the Cauvery water sharing, and between Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The media coverage highlights the problem of water being on the State List of the constitution – its management therefore being an issue of the federal states. The centre cannot force the states to give their consent to the NRLP which is a major hurdle in its implementation. The articles therefore include debates asking whether water should be brought under the central governments control (moved to the "Union List"), or to be at least moved to the Concurrent List, under which both central government and the federal states could implement laws, though the laws passed by the Union would overrule those passed by the states. This however would be considered to be a huge step towards a more centralized organization of the country and would take significant power away

from the federal states. Also the Supreme Court judgement demanding the states to cooperate on the issue of river linking is reported on in that context. Overall, the reporting is not biased to a particular state and rather specifies the inter-state issues that need to be solved if all of the projects under the NRLP should become reality. The debate on cooperation between states and also on the question of possibly bringing water under the central government's control once more shows the centrality of debating the role of the federal versus the central state as well as the aspect of nation-building efforts that is deeply intertwined with the discourse on large dam building. Agreements made on water sharing could be in the interest of the centre – possibly leading to a more unified country. Furthermore, it is surely in the interest of the central government, though not verbalised as such as of now, to use the NRLP as a possible step for power transfer away from the federal states towards the centre.

In the case of the Ken-Betwa Project however, inter-state disputes are not a dominant theme in the reporting. Some reports hint that agreements between the two states, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, have not been signed and that only one of them is a major beneficiary of the project, however the states seem to choose not to turn to the media on the issue and the debates take place outside the public sphere. Therefore no highly opinionated articles appear on the issue. This could be possibly be read as a) a significant difference in power between the states, i.e. though Madhya Pradesh might be disadvantaged by the project it's power position does not provide the state with the means to risk a possible dispute with Uttar Pradesh, b) Madhya Pradesh's, as the likely loser in the project, lack of power in confronting the central government, c) possible other unknown deals made between the state's involved or even d) a lack of importance of the project to the Madhya Pradesh government. However these are only hypotheses, as the material does not provide further explanations.

The reporting on the Polavaram Project differs to a great extent, as the inter-state disputes are a topic of major importance and take up the largest share of the media reports. It is mainly Odisha's BJD government opposing the project that is covered in the analysed data and they seem to use the media's attention to a large extent to make their voice be heard. The findings of that section included that the displacement of the Adivasi communities is used as the main argument of Odisha's politicians to oppose the project, although articles critically questioned it to be the true reason, and also that the BJD continuously points out that it feels left out within the federal structure and discriminated against by the centre which in their view is favouring Andhra Pradesh. The debate is very one-sided as the conflictual relationship is only portrayed through the lens of Odishan politicians in the articles whereas the Andhra Pradesh government mainly refrains from commenting. Eye-catching with regard to the Adivasi argument is, that though claiming for acting in the best interest of the Adivasi communities, these communities themselves are hardly represented. They are not given the floor by the Odishan politicians claiming to act in the name of the Adivasi communities to articulate themselves; the communities' wishes or visions for the future are not addressed. It is rather a set-up in which the Odishan politicians claim to be speaking *for* the affected communities, but they do not seem to speak *with* them – let alone offer space for them to speak for themselves.

In the case of the reporting on the NRLP on irrigation and agriculture issues, the proponents quoted often use the narrative of increased agricultural production in legitimizing the project, also in light of growing population numbers. Another aspect that is also mentioned is that of economic interests in a boost of agriculture production. Once again Uma Bharti is one of the prominent proponents cited. Opponents criticising this narrative also appear in the data, however to a smaller extent. Overall, the topic provokes less opposing opinions than other issues, as it is probably hard to attack the argument that a growing population will need a

growth in food production. Yet, it could be asked, whether the NRLP is the best possible way to chose in order to enhance the agricultural output.

In the case of the Ken-Betwa Project, there is much more discussion on the issue. Many of the articles share a narrative of the backward-, drought-prone-, and poverty-riddenness of the area and the idea of enhancing the region by providing irrigation is implied. The development idea is very strong in this case. Other than in the case of the NRLP, the debate does not include ideas of raising the GDP or other economic gains for the whole nation, but rather highlights the status of Bundelkhand. Critically voices are also included to a very small extend, pointing out that many of the districts the project claims to help, might not even receive water. As the narrative used is one very much relating to the poorest part of the population, it might be difficult to question it without being suspected of not granting development to the poorest. This might be the reason why so little debate is taking place. Yet, once more it should be noted, that those parts of society the project claims to aim at, do hardly appear in the debates and their statements are hardly featured.

Also in the case of the Polavaram Project the increase of water for irrigation purposes and thereby helping farmers is the most used argument by proponents in the analysed data. In the debate, it is mainly Andhra Pradesh's Chief Minister that highlights the aspect. The articles render visible who is addressed by his government: claims of prosperity for the farmers seem to include only a specific section of large-scale farmers. Those suffering from displacement by the construction and living of subsistence agriculture are not addressed by Naidu. Critics are mainly absent in the reporting on the irrigation and agriculture aspect. Other than in the reporting on the Ken-Betwa link, the economic status of the region that will benefit is not mentioned to such a large extend – there is no image of a poor, suffering farmer being used, but rather promises of prosperity are

articulated by the government in charge. Instead of evoking images of the poor and suffering that will “finally” be part of development and get to know development’s benefits, the strategy chosen in case of the Polavaram Project is one of projecting images of a bright and prosperous future rather than portraying a current reality that needs change and progress. Both perspectives are surely informed by the same developmental imagination, yet the foci are different. This choice might also be linked to the fact that the region supposedly benefiting is indeed less poor than Ken-Betwa's Bundelkhand region, and the image of the poor farmer in need would be indeed not a suitable one, as the project addresses rather large scale farming for agricultural production rather than small, subsistence farming as often conducted by the economically weaker sections of the rural society.

When considering the social costs, the analysis of the reporting on the NRLP has shown that the issue is highlighted to a great extent, however the great deviations in statements on the number of people affected shows that there is still a large gap in knowledge on the scope of the consequences. Several articles point out how the Indian state in the past has often given very bad examples in conducting resettlements. There are also reporters referring to the power imbalances within the project and asking the question of who's development is meant to be achieved. A questioning of the developmental imagination behind the whole NRLP therefore is in place within the analysed media. Uma Bharti is once more the only proponent reacting via the media to the critique of excessive social costs that the project includes. In her reaction she employs different strategies including that of downplaying the consequences and of inverting the critique by claiming that the resettlement will actually not harm the affected communities but even be beneficial to them. This reaction again is very much in line with a developmental imagination that plays with the idea of helping the “backward” communities by resettling them into areas that would force them to get in touch with “the modern



world”.

Also in the case of the Ken-Betwa Project there still seem to be a lot unknown with regard to the project's social consequences. There are only two articles in which the reporters address the issue in depth, it is not a topic of major debates. Both articles also highlight that the affected communities themselves do not seem to have sufficient information. Within the data no proponent or politician addresses the issue at all. The issue has so far largely been ignored within the media discourse.

Not so in the case of the Polavaram Project, where much more has been written about the social consequences, and most authors do so in a very critical way. Politicians from Odisha are once quoted extensively on the issue, however always only referring to the people displaced in their respective state. Other than them, activists, Adivasi leaders and affected communities are given a voice in highlighting the consequences. Central or Andhra Pradesh government politician do not comment on the issue or are not quoted doing so in the analysed publications. Those pushing and implementing the project are absent from the debate, which can also be interpreted as a lack of necessity to comment: they can implement the project either way, as the power is on their side and the critique that does take place does not challenge the status quo of existing power hierarchies. Yet it is interesting to see that those often marginalised in the reporting do get a chance to speak here and that opportunities are provided for voices from the margins. In the case of the Polavaram Dam and on the specific topic of social consequences I would claim that these voices do influence the narrative portrayed in the media.

With regard to political narratives, the reporting on the NRLP showed how former President Kalam's Independence Day speech from 2002 influenced the

implementation of the NRLP and also the Supreme Court judgement on the NRLP to a significant extent. Both are regularly referred to in the media reporting and form important points of reference within the discourse. The analysis also highlighted the use of religious elements within the discourse by i.e. reporting on the building of temples at the sources of rivers that are subject to link projects. Furthermore, it showed how the media reporting narrates a history of the NRLP starting with former Prime Minister Vajpayee, thereby creating a storyline of the NRLP being a BJP project – it started off under Vajpayee and is now being pushed by Modi. The whole history prior to that is often left out within the discursive framing. Also in the case of the reporting on the Ken-Betwa Project the link between Vajpayee and Modi is strongly highlighted. Furthermore, the analysis of the Ken-Betwa Project once more revealed the importance of Uma Bharti as the leading political figure in the debate. Her statements such as calling a delay in the project a "national crime", elucidate the connection of the Ken-Betwa Project with nation-building efforts that Bharti time and again puts in the foreground of the discourse. The debates are very much dominated by the central government, whereas the Chief Ministers of the two states concerned refrain from taking part in the debate and leave the floor to her.

This contrasts with the analysis of the Polavaram Project which revealed that the main political figure in that case is Andhra Pradesh's Chief Minister Naidu who has a very high rate of appearance in the debate and pushes the implementation. The central government on the other hand is very much absent in the debate. Catchphrases used by him such as building "the lifeline of the state" and making the state "drought-free", appear over and again in the articles either by citing him or as phrases adopted from him by the journalists. Naidu also repeatedly emphasizes the technological side of development thereby recalling images used in the post-independence area.

The idea of state-building is the same in Naidu's narrative with regard to the Polavaram Project as Bharti's efforts with regard to the Ken-Betwa Project, yet the frame both politicians refer to is a significantly different one: while Bharti's nation-building imaginaries refers to the framework of a central Indian state, Naidu's point of reference is that of "his" state of Andhra Pradesh. It is interesting to see that strategies employed and vocabulary used overlap and are used for the same purposes, yet the states that are meant to be built through these efforts differ significantly. Similarly as Ken-Betwa for Bharti, the Polavaram Project becomes the epitome of Naidu's actions. Naidu in his statements makes the Polavaram Project very much one of his state's (and his personal) achievements. There is no connection to the bigger Indian state implied. Also the fact that the project is part of the NRLP is rarely mentioned. This is a very different issue in the case of the Ken-Betwa Project which, with Bharti as a central government politician as its major advocate, is much more portrayed in the context of the NRLP and as a project not only enhancing the status of the region, but also of the nation.

	<b>Polavaram</b>	<b>Ken-Betwa</b>
<b>Narendra Modi</b>	14%	19%
<b>Uma Bharti</b>	6%	31%
<b>Chief Ministers of Respective States</b>	42%	10% (UP) & 7 % (MP)
<b>Total: Central</b>	20%	50%
<b>Total: Regional</b>	42%	10% (UP) & 7 % (MP)

*Figure 24: Rate of appearance of political figures within the data on the Polavaram and the Ken-Betwa Project (Percentage of documents which include the mentioned politicians out of the total number of documents).*

The difference of the central and the regional government in the debate of the Ken-Betwa and the Polavaram Project can also be read from the table above. Modi in both cases plays a rather subordinate role. In the case of the media

reporting on the Polavaram Project he appears in 14% of the article, on the Ken-Betwa Project in 19%. In both cases he is however hardly quoted and mostly only mentioned as a sideline. This is very different with Bharti, where the deviation is most striking: she is mentioned in only 6% of the articles on Polavaram and in 31% on the articles on Ken-Betwa. Also she is very opinionated and when mentioned her statements usually receive a lot of attention within the articles. The significant role of the Chief Minister in the case of the Polavaram Dam is also once more very visible: Naidu is mentioned in 42 % of articles on the Polavaram Dam. As comparison, the Chief Ministers of UP and MP are only mentioned in 10 % and 7 % respectively of the articles dealing with the Ken-Betwa Project. These numbers render very visible who influences the discourse on which projects to which extend.

After this in depth consideration of the media coverage, the ensuing chapter will contrast the findings with the experiences of those affected by the projects by the means of a case study of the Polavaram Project. In how far does the reporting clash with the reality lived by those affected? The aim of the following chapter is to give an insight into possibly differing perspectives and portrayals of the project to those apparent from the media analysis. In what ways do the experiences from those affected by the projects differ to the picture gained through the lens of media coverage?

## **Chapter 3: Local Perspectives**

### **3.1. Displacing Adivasi Communities**

To enable a comparison between the media debates and the local realities, interviews on the case of the Polavaram Project were conducted in 2012 in areas affected by the project as well as in the state's capital Hyderabad. Before moving towards the findings of the fieldwork, the following segment will provide background information on the position of Adivasi communities in Indian society, as well as some of the legal framework under which the resettlement takes place, in order to grasp a better understanding of the situation of those affected by displacement.

The Polavaram Project could result in the largest displacement caused by dam constructions in India's history. And with that many problems arise, including that of resettlement. With regards to Adivasi communities in particular, the numbers are alarming. For every five evacuees, three are reported to be Adivasis. In the villages barely any non-Adivasis can be found. In larger settlements non-Adivasis work in government or non-government agencies or as traders, but mostly not in permanent positions (cf. Bhushan and Murali 1994). It is therefore Adivasi communities in particular that are negatively affected by the Polavaram Project.

The dominant portrayal of Adivasi communities in India often focuses on rituals, dances, and handicrafts, as opposed to citizens with complex histories or in relation to oppressions faced and adjustments made. One such example of this portrayal is the representation of Adivasis in museum spaces in India. As Sebastian points out, Adivasi are often presented "as the exotic cultural other" (Sebastian 2015, 35). He further adds: "There is a serious need to rethink about the representational practices of museum anthropology which see the Adivasis

merely as cultural subjects to the exclusion of them as historical agents" (Sebastian 2015, 43). A prominent example of the way Adivasi communities are represented is the Adivasi Mela, an exhibition of Adivasi culture, which regularly takes place in Odisha. At the mela, Adivasi communities are shown sitting in traditional clothing in traditional housing behind fences, producing handicrafts and performing dances within an exhibition hall. A strong resemblance to *Völkerschauen*, where "exotic" human beings often from the colonies were exhibited in Europe, can be found in these melas.<sup>23</sup> This mindset is also visible on the homepage of the Adivasi Mela, which reads: "The tribal people of Orissa [...] usually don't intermingle with outsiders, since they are not too advanced and are quite shy. [...] The tribal people live a life without any luxuries that the urban city provides and yet are content with it" (Odisha Adivasi Mela 2016). The portrayal of Adivasi communities is therefore set up in opposition to modern society. As Bergmann points out, "tribal communities are scheduled not only to bring them into contact with mainstream society, but also to preserve their cultural distinctness" (Bergmann 2016, 82). Yet how this is done can be questioned and is well illustrated in the Odisha Mela example. The extent to which this discourse also affects the self-representation of the communities and the NGOs working for the welfare of Adivasi communities, are questions to be kept in mind with regards to the fieldwork.<sup>24</sup>

Concerning the legal framework under which resettlement takes place, it should be noted that most of those affected by the Polavaram Project live in so-called Scheduled Areas which guarantee special protection and rights to the Adivasi populations. Article 244 (1) of the Indian constitution, the Fifth Scheduled Areas

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23 For an extensive bibliography on literature on human zoos see: Radauer 2017.

24 On the construction, affirmation and contestation of Adivasi identity see Rycroft and Dasgupta 2011.

Act, Provisions as to the Administration and Control of Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes, regulates the establishment of such designated Scheduled Areas (cf. Government of India, Ministry of Law and Justice 2011). On the basis of Article 244, the Andhra Pradesh government passed the Land Transfer Regulation Act in 1970, commonly referred to as the 1/70 Act. It prohibits the transfer of tribal land to non-tribals and the holding of land by non-tribals in general in such Scheduled Areas.

In the 1980s however, the Andhra Pradesh government tried to make amendments to the law so that the prohibition excluded the transfer of land to the state. This move was however prevented by the union government. In 2000, the same situation occurred once again, when the state government was in favour of allowing an aluminium company to mine for bauxite in an Adivasi area. However, protest by opposition parties and civil society once again prevented the amendment. Still, "the episode brought to light how a state's tribal welfare machinery can be twisted to not only act against tribal interests but actively undermine the democratic processes that can defend those interests" (Down to Earth 2003a). While the legal situation has not changed and the 1/70s Act remains in force, the Polavaram Project is now being constructed in such Scheduled Areas. Existing legal provisions have been sidelined in order to proceed with the project's implementation. The state therefore unlawfully acquires Adivasi land in order to implement the Polavaram Project. As Bondla and Rao point out:

Given a choice of constructing or not constructing the Polavaram dam, the tribal people reject the idea of the former. But the fundamental question is whether they have a choice of decision; a large majority of them feel that there is no choice and that their choice has not been elicited at all so far by the state machinery. [...] The authoritative and hegemonic state is going ahead, and in its own way is violating the

tribal rights guaranteed through the Constitution (Bondla and Rao 2010, 4).

Next to ignoring the law 1/70s Act, another relevant law in the context of the Scheduled Areas is the Provisions of the Panchayat (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), which lays down that no development projects can be conducted in such areas before the communities are consulted. Article 4 (i) of the PESA reads:

The Gram Sabha or the Panchayats at the appropriate level shall be consulted before making the acquisition of land in the Scheduled Areas for development projects and before re-settling or rehabilitating persons affected by such projects in the Scheduled Areas (Government of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs 1996).

The extent to which this law is obeyed in the context of the Polavaram Project will be among the issues examined in the following part, which will analyse the way the resettlement is implemented.

### **3.2. Implementation of Resettlement**

The government claims that the resettlement and rehabilitation packages in the case of the Polavaram Project are the best ever given in India (cf. The Hindu 2006). The packages are meant to cover the loss of housing and land. In the case of the housing package, the value of a house is calculated and whilst non-Adivasi oustees then receive the respective amount in money, Adivasis are supposed to be given new houses with an equivalent value.

The second major compensation package, the land package, offers land to land



compensation for up to 6.5 acres (2.6 hectare). For land owners with more than 6.5 acres, money will be provided as compensation for those acres exceeding the 6.5 acres limit. A major difficulty arising from this concept is that the government is not in possession of as much land as needed to compensate all those affected. As a consequences, the fieldwork has shown that oustees are often compensated with separate acres of land, long distances apart. Consequently, they are not cultivable at the same time. It seems even more difficult to find land for a whole village at one stretch, which results in former communities being split apart by long distances. Additionally, the new land is often a lot less fruitful than the old land. It was also pointed out that when assigned a new stretch of land, the new owner often learns that the land given by the government is already cultivated by someone else. Overall, the land distribution seems to be closely linked to personal connections and power hierarchies. As one NGO worker described the situation: "If you are intelligent and you have a good position you can bargain for good land and a good price for the house. If you're not in this position, there is no chance for you" (interview #31).

The approach taken with the packages seems in some ways contradictory: as the submergence takes place in Scheduled Areas, non-Adivasis should, as per the 1/70s Act, not be in possession of any land holdings within that area at all, yet they are compensated. Linked to that is the issue that land titles are often in hands of non-Adivasis, though the land is de facto cultivated by Adivasi communities since the 1970s and 80s. During that period, leftist movements occupied land in the possession of non-Adivasi people, which, according to the 1/70s Act, they were not allowed to own. This land was subsequently handed over to Adivasi communities, who have continued to cultivate it until the present day. However, as the land titles are still registered in the name of the former owners, it is those former owners that are entitled to receive compensation for land that they effectively no longer possess, to the exclusion of current land users (cf. interview

#31).

There are further struggles regarding the lack of official land titles: According to the "Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act", the land occupied by Adivasi communities is legally owned by these. The Act also includes a paragraph securing the communities the right

to in situ rehabilitation including alternative land in cases where the forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers have been illegally evicted or displaced from forest land of any description without receiving their legal entitlement to rehabilitation (Ministry of Law and Justice 2007).

Yet, the government refuses to hand out land titles to the forest dwellers, in order to avoid further compensation demands. Without the titles no compensation will be received. NGOs active in the area support the communities in gaining land titles, yet in 2012 only 30% of claimants had been successful in receiving their entitlements (cf. interview #31).

Concerning the effects of resettlement, it should be noted that large parts of the communities live off subsistence agriculture and minor forest produce. The worst affected Adivasi communities in the area are Konda Reddy and Koya. When displaced they are resettled into non-tribal areas. There is no forest to collect products from and income through the collection of minor forest products such as beedi leafs will disappear (cf. interview #31). If they are no longer able to live off their land they will be forced to find work as unskilled labourers (cf. interview #26, #27, #28, #29, #30). Without access to forest and fertile land, the displacement thereby poses a great risk of impoverishment to the communities. As one interviewed villager pointed out:

We depend on the forest, on neem to brush our teeth, on firewood to cook, we are not able to buy gas connections for cooking with gas. The minor forest products are also highly important for us for cooking. We depend on agriculture. It's the only thing we know. We don't know how to do any other work. There is no land around the houses! Where should we live? Where should we put our animals? Where is the grass for the animals? (interview #10)

Also at risk are the inhabitants of surrounding villages that are not being displaced, but are competing with the newly displaced people for the same resources (cf. Bhushan and Murali 1994).

One of the most discussed themes in the interviews was the communities' fear of losing their culture when displaced. As an interviewee from the village of Kuyuguru in AP commented: "We fight against the dam strictly. We have our tradition, culture, duties here. We never leave this place" (interview #13). In interviews with NGO staff, and also with community members themselves, themes such as traditions, religious customs, the importance of nature, the strong ties to the land on which they live, and the ancestral land of the affected Adivasi communities were central to the discussion. The spiritual importance of the locations was repeated in several interviews, with for example narrations of ancestor who had died in the village and whose souls therefore could only be found in the village location (cf. i.e. interview #7). Also the head of a Koya village under submergence in Khammam district explained:

We are habituated here. The forest, our culture, marriage systems, festivals, death ceremonies take place here. Our ancestors have died here; their souls can be found here! We depend on this place. We rather die than leave it (interview #10).

Furthermore the interviewees reported that certain festivals can only take place in areas scheduled to be submerged by the dam construction, as the village gods live there (cf. interview #13). The concern of losing the community's rules, regulations, customs, and systems due to the displacement was articulated repeatedly (cf. interviews #7, #23). As one villager pointed out: "We are strongly refusing [the resettlement, note by author]. We will lose everything" (interview #13). Also the village head of Kommuru village in AP, close to the border with Chhattisgarh and Odisha, pointed out: "How can we leave? It is impossible! We don't want any money. We want to stay. How can we leave?" (interview #21). He further continued: "If everybody comes together we hope we can stop it" (interview #21).

Bhushan and Murali accuse the authorities of a "lack of sensitivity to socio-cultural realities and tribal modes of life" (Bhushan and Murali 1994, 73). One of the interviewed NGO workers pointed out that the government seems to have an "apartment perspective" on the issue of displacement, thereby implying that the government thinks of people living in cities that could comparatively easily be moved from one apartment to another, whereas the location has a whole other dimension to the oustees as it is also a spiritually important place to these (cf. interview #33). For the Koya people the construction of the dam means that more than half of the total population of their community will be displaced. Therefore the existence of the very community seems to be at stake with the construction of the dam. Anti-dam activists hence go as far as seeing in their displacement the "possibility of a cultural genocide" (Bhushan and Murali 1994, 109). Also the leader of a Adivasi Student Federation that I met in his house in Chinturu pointed out:

The government says Adivasis will live a better life in colonies, but Adivasi already live a good life! They have their houses, sacred

places, trees, good relations. The government doesn't value the Adivasi life and culture, they don't respect it. In Adivasi society here there are no beggars: people have land and forest, now laws are protecting them. What happens after resettlement no one knows. They will lose the protection" (interview #23).

As visible from the examples above, the narrative of a loss of culture was very strong in my interactions in the field. One NGO in Khammam district focused especially on the cultural heritage of the communities, and had booklets on the communities' dances published. The founder also arranged for the me to hear traditional songs sung by community members. In the case of this NGO in particular, the image of Adivasi communities presented was romanticised and very much in line with the hegemonic tribal image, as described further above, so was also the self-portrayal of many community members.

To further portray how the resettlement is de facto conducted, the subsequent part will tell the story of the inhabitants of the Polavaram Model Colony, which was visited during the fieldwork.

### **3.3. Polavaram Model Colony**

To illustrate the way the resettlement is enforced, the Polavaram Model Colony can serve as an example. The colony was designed for three villages earmarked for submergence. The villagers were asked to move there as early as 2007, while their villages have still not been submerged at the point of writing this dissertation. One elderly man from the village of Paragasani Padhu (cf. interview #30), who today lives in the colony and with whom I met during a visit to the colony, shared his perspective on how the resettlement was executed. He reported that the first time government officials approached the village and offered new

houses in the newly constructed colony to the villagers, they promised that the village would only need to move once the construction of the dam was realised. Yet once the houses were completed, the government officials urged them to move in directly, otherwise they threatened to hand over the houses to another village and to disqualify the villagers from any further compensation. The villagers and the government officials agreed on a compromise: They would move into the houses *pro forma*, but would continue living in the old village until the dam construction was to be finished. Once the moving rituals were completed and some objects were placed into the houses in order to fulfil the agreement, the government declared the village to be "officially shifted". As a consequence, the local school as well as the health station in the old village closed down and the ration cards for food supply were only valid in the new settlement. Out of necessity, the people then moved to the new colony.

Yet soon after their arrival, they realised that living there was unsuitable in many ways. In the new colony, concrete houses for each family of the villages had been built, but these houses are much smaller than the old houses plus the new roofs were leaking. As one villager pointed out: "The house is more sand than cement! The rain comes in" (interview #30). The concrete offers a very different climate inside the house compared to the previous houses (cf. interview #30). In the old villages houses were built of natural material available from the surroundings. The 'traditional' houses usually have "two to four rooms, a verandah for their residence with provision for kitchen, 'pelligondhi' (proportion of the room where offerings to their ancestors are made), attic for storing grains, etc., and separate shelter for goats and pigs, besides room for keeping fodder, firewood, agricultural implements, etc." (Bhushan and Murali 1994, 115). In the new houses barely any of this has been taken into consideration – they consist of only two small concrete rooms.

Furthermore, there is no space for cattle to graze. The farming land the villagers were provided with in the new colony is barely usable: it is considered less fertile and rockier than the land owned before. One of the villagers noted: “Some people, but not all people, have land here. But the land is not good, not fertile. Only drylands, but no irrigation. We depend on the rains. No wetlands” (interview #30). There is no surrounding forest, which deprives the communities of food, grazing ground as well as energy and income sources. Previously the communities had firewood on their doorstep, whereas now they must walk far distances.



*Image 6: One of the two rooms of a house in the New Polavaram Model Colony with water leaking from the roof as visible on the walls (by author, Sept. 2012).*

Another aspect coming up in the interviews was that of disputes within the neighbourhood. The new neighbours do not seem to be pleased with the new settlers arriving. An incident reported was that when after a few months in the new colony two of the villagers died, the neighbouring villages did not permit the new settlers to burn the corpses. As a result they had to walk 22 km back to the

old villages to be able to undertake their funeral rituals (cf. interview #30).

In order to survive, the male members of the family are trying to find work, usually as day-labourers. But there is hardly any work available in the surrounding areas. They are a lot more dependent on monetary income now than they used to be (cf. interview #30). During the fieldwork in 2012, it was clear that the resettlement had split the community apart. Some villagers returned to their lives in the old villages, while others remained in the new colony in order to access school education now denied in the old village. An initiative led by a local NGO tried to overcome the issue by setting up a school in the old village after the government school closed down, but shortly afterwards in a crack down by the government this was closed down and declared illegal (cf. interviews #26, #27, #28, #29, more on the Polavaram New Colony also in: Feldes 2013).



*Image 7: Construction of Resettlement Houses (by author, Sept. 2012).*





*Image 8: Houses in the New Polavaram Model Colony. Each house has a separate toilet building, as seen on the left side (by author, Sept. 2012).*



*Image 9: Traditional houses in a village affected by submergence (by author, Sept. 2012).*

### **3.4. Lack of Information and Protest**

According to the accounts from the field, government officials spread misinformation and threatened the communities in order to implement the resettlement. Public hearings, which are legally required as according to the PESA Act discussed above, should serve as an information platform for affected communities on the Polavaram Project and the associated resettlement plans, were seldom organised. On the occasions where meetings took place, the affected communities were largely excluded from them. One interview partner, an NGO worker affected by displacement, had tried to attend a meeting and described the situation as follows:

Actually the affected people were not allowed to participate in this meeting. The police did not allow them to enter the meeting. The police was beating activists and people. Instead government was bringing people from non-submergence areas to this meeting that would be pro-dam. Government wanted to make a pro-dam impression (interview #7).

The hearings were held only in English, a language which the vast majority of the local population does not speak. This incident illustrates that while mechanisms to promote participatory democracy within the project exist in theory, they are ignored or avoided in practice. As already seen in the chapter on the media analysis, both Odisha and Chhattisgarh, have reproached the Andhra Pradesh government for proceeding with the construction work also on the ground for not conducting the mandatory public hearings. As the media analysis also revealed, it is especially the protest by Odisha's politicians that makes it into the news. Yet the fieldwork revealed that manifold protest is organised also by the local communities, but there is no reporting about these projects taking place.

Many villages have written appeals not only to the government officials in Hyderabad, but also to the central government Delhi. However, most of them have not received a response. The local population participates in rallies, foot marches, road blocks and hunger strikes, some of them taking place in the affected area, but also in Hyderabad and in the capital (cf. interview #7, #10, #11, #23, #26, #32). Discussion forums are being organized. In lot of these actions, Community Based Organisations (CBOs) are involved. Part of these are, amongst others, alliances such as the Godavari Basin Action Group or the Adivasi Rakshana Samithi (ARS). Groups such as those mentioned are well connected, for example to the Narmada protesters (cf. interview #26, #28). In cooperation with the Narmada Bachao Andolan exposure visits took place: affected people from the Polavaram

Dam visited activists at Narmada to learn about their experiences with protest and displacement. As one NGO worker reported:

Some people from our communities were sent to NBA (Narmada) to learn from them. Medha Patkar was also there. This was done four times. Each time twenty to thirty people were sent. They were exchanging information like: What was the situation after the displacement like? They were sharing first-hand experiences (interview #7).

One other NGO worker further reported upon these exposure visits:

They [the people from the community that took part in the visits, note by the author] felt very bad there. The land people got was not good. Sometimes when people went to the assigned land, the land did not actually exist. Many of them became beggars. I don't want my people to face these problems (interview #10)

Resistance also took other forms, as I learned about in the interviews. To illustrate some forms of resistance I encountered, I would like to present three examples:

I. In a village affected by the canal works women starting squatting the land when excavators arrived to dig the canal. They have cultivated this land for many generations. The women told the workers that they will not leave the place until they get appropriate compensation. As a result of the blockade, which was later joined by the men of the village, canal works were stopped for ten days. In the end they achieved a partial success: they received 1,30,000 Rs per acre, instead of the previously offered 35,000 Rs, as compensation (cf. interview #33).

II. In another village people proudly reported the story of a government official who came to the village two years earlier in order to convince the community to accept their offer of compensation. Angry about the way they they had been treated they refused to speak to him and locked him in one of the houses for one day. After they released him no government official never came back again, at least until the day the incident was narrated to me (cf. interview #21).

III. At a meeting in Kokonuru village with workers for local NGOs, village heads from different surrounding villages, and members of the ARS committee, other forms of action that was taken by the affected communities were reported on (cf. interview #10). They narrated for example how in November 2011 seventeen Adivasi CBOs from the area affected by the dam went to Delhi to discuss the issue of the Polavaram Dam construction with Ministers of the central government. Meetings took place with three ministers: Mr. Kishore Chandra Deo, then Minister of Tribal Affairs, Mrs. Jayanthi Natarajan, then Minister of Forests and Environment, and the then Minister of Water Resources, Mr. Harish Rawat. The CBOs expressed their concerns regarding the dam construction. While the Forest Minister stated that she has never even heard about the dam, the Minister for Tribal Affairs promised that he will not allow an inch of land to be submerged. Also the response of the Minister of Water Resources was a positive one for the activists: he said that he will not give any permission for the construction of the dam. Either the ministers were just giving empty words to the people or they overestimated their own position: rather than issuing a stop, the project soon after gained national status.

These examples may not illustrate effective ways of stopping the dam construction, but they show that people are very much involved in expressing their discontent. Yet, a major constraint for many of the local organisations involved in the protest is the 2010 "Foreign Contribution Regulation Act"

according to which the state can deprive organisations from foreign funds when they act against the state's interest. Some of the NGOs on site have become very reserved in speaking out publicly against the dam, as the government could easily state an involvement against the dam as an "anti-state activity" (cf. interview #33), which could make their work quite difficult and have consequences such as being banned from any external fundings.

### **3.5. Differing Narratives: The Local Perspectives**

The analysis has shown, that many issues arise concerning the resettlement of the communities. The local perspective shows that many issues are much more complex than the media coverage on the social costs was hinting at. Considering the proposed benefits for irrigation, the Polavaram Project seems more likely to benefit large scale farming as opposed to small scale farming and subsistence agriculture of the kind dominant within the Adivasi communities.<sup>25</sup> As Klingensmith points out, those affected by displacement often have very limited visibility. He connects this to developmentalist nationalism, which has only a very abstract interest in the well-being of the local population. Its preoccupation is an ideological one; while it results in projects which affect real people, they are nothing more than an abstract idea (cf. Klingensmith 2007). While not stated publicly, it can be assumed that similar ideas regarding the alleged positive effects of displacement for Adivasi communities, as illustrated by the controversial Supreme Court judgement in the case Narmada Bachao Andolan versus the Union of India, are also held by the government officials in charge of the Polavaram Project. As the Supreme Court judgement is a highly interesting document within

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25 Even though, according to a study from the International Water Management Institute, 95% of the area that supposedly will benefit from the irrigations scheme is already under irrigation, while the rest is not cultivable land (Down to Earth 2011).

the discourse on large scale water projects and development in general and very well reflects the mindset towards the so called ‘backward’ or ‘tribal’ communities currently prevailing within the central state authorities, I would like to quote a larger section from the ruling. The judgement reads:

Displacement of people living on the proposed sites and the areas to be submerged is an important issue. Most of the hydrology projects are located in remote and inaccessible areas, where local population is, like in the present case, either illiterate or having marginal means of employment and the per capita income of the families is low. It is a fact that people are displaced by projects from their ancestral homes. Displacement of these people would undoubtedly disconnect them from their past, culture, custom and traditions, but then it becomes necessary to harvest a river for larger good. A nature river is not only meant for the people close by but it should be for the benefit of those who can make use of it, being away from it or nearby. [...] A properly drafted R&R plan would improve living standards of displaced persons after displacement. For example residents of villages around Bhakra Nangal Dam, Nagarjun Sagar Dam, Tehri, Bhilai Steel Plant, Bokaro and Bala Iron and Steel Plant and numerous other developmental sites are better off than people living in villages in whose vicinity no development project came in. It is not fair that tribals and the people in un-developed villages should continue in the same condition without ever enjoying the fruits of science and technology for better health and have a higher quality of life style. Should they not be encouraged to seek greener pastures elsewhere, if they can have access to it, either through their own efforts due to information exchange or due to outside compulsions? It is with this object in view that the R&R plans which are developed are meant to

ensure that those who move must be better off in the new locations at Government cost. In the present case, the R&R packages of the States, specially of Gujarat, are such that the living conditions of the oustees will be much better than what they had in their tribal hamlets (Supreme Court of India 2017, 89f.).

Though unverballed by politicians in the case of the Polavaram Project so far, the findings from the field research suggest that a similar logic is at play in justifying the treatment of displaced communities. In other words, those affected by resettlement should be grateful as they will finally come to enjoy a better life than in their “tribal hamlets”. ‘Development’ is brought to the ‘traditional’, ‘tribal’ community by displacing them into ‘modern’ society. However, the example of the Polavaram Model Colony, created as a showcase for resettlement, illustrated that the promise of better living conditions for the communities is very questionable, not to speak of all those not eligible for compensation at all. Concerning the legal framework, this section also outlined how the Indian constitution and subsequent laws provide legal protection to the Adivasi communities affected by such projects yet these laws are largely ignored or circumvented in practice. The way in which these legal provisions are bypassed demonstrates that the notion of development for the benefit of the country excludes the most vulnerable populations.

Looking at the previous chapters, one could interpret the dam construction proponents as acting from a perspective that seeks to bring 'progress' via transforming a natural habitat, a rural area inhabited by people often hardly involved in monetary economy, into a man-made symbol of power. As already pointed out above, large dams can serve as an image of the taming of nature by man. Just as the natural environments are thereby framed as not being developed (yet), the same is done to the people. The data on the project clarifies that local



communities are not included in any stage of the planning of the Polavaram Dam. Planning is done without them, even though laws exist which require the government to include these communities in the planning stages. Decisions are made *for* the affected communities; not *with* them. By doing so the people are framed as not being capable of knowing what is good for them. The government creates "displaceable objects" out of its citizens, in the interest of the state, and in the interest of "progress". The affected people are not recognized as independent subjects who are eligible as negotiates. In a paper on the Ethiopian government's construction of a large dam in the Omo River Abbink identifies the image of "dispensability of state citizens" created in dam discourses; an image that can easily be applied to the way the Polavaram Project is being dealt with. He also refers the lack of knowledge on the affected people's opinions:

I discuss the local people here last, because, characteristically, little is known of their ideas and opinions. There is a gap in knowledge, both about their exact relation to the lands they inhabit as well as their viewpoints: they were not asked or rarely consulted by policy makers, experts or independent researchers, and as yet no one can speak for them (Abbink 2012, 138).

Transferring this to the analysis of the Polavaram Dam it can be said that the knowledge and opinions of those affected by the dam have not been of interest to the policy makers. Their viewpoint is not considered to be a valuable one. Using Michel Foucault's ideas on discursive formations and the discourse inherent systems of exclusion and inclusion, the Polavaram Project can be seen as dominated by government officials who are in a position of power to define what is best for the state they rule, and for its inhabitants. Thereby a clear preference is made for a specific class of citizens, whereas others, in this case specifically the Adivasi communities affected, are left out. Though the media analysis has shown

that Adivasi voices also appear in the media coverage, the extent of the effects of the displacement for the communities are only touched upon and by far do not portray the wide range of issues de facto included in the resettlement processes. The analysis has also shown that resistance is taking place locally, which yet again hardly appears in the media coverage. Nederveen Pieterse relates the displacement of marginalized communities to nation building efforts writing that:

The politics of nation building involves the marginalization of aliens, the suppression of minorities and of indigenous people – a process captured under the heading of internal colonialism. While national monuments are being erected, outside the glare of the spotlights aliens are expropriated, minorities constructed and refugees created (Nederveen Pieterse 2010, 67).

This again seems to fit very well also to the case discussed here. “Internal colonialism” is a term that does appear in discourses on development projects in India, also for example with regard to the North-Eastern regions where dam building is planned on a massive scale for hydropower generation. Yet the power generated is envisaged to be completely transferred to the Delhi region, with no benefits for the local population whatsoever. In line with these thoughts, researchers such as Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee point out that the conflicts between indigenous communities and the state can be seen as a representation of the failure of hegemonic democracy. He adds:

Local struggles and resistance movements are ultimately struggles for the 'democratization of democracy', which requires seeking new ways of participatory decision-making as well as counter-hegemonic discursive practices of participatory democracy (Banerjee 2011, 336).

Current policy making mechanisms, according to Indian law, have to allow local participation and the consent of the affected communities. Theoretically therefore, mechanisms for a participatory democracy exist. However, as the case study demonstrated, these were plainly ignored or avoided. The communities are not included in the discourse on what shape development should or could take and their opinions on the matter are not considered relevant information. In how far the democratic institutions that are at place fulfil their purposes in that matter can therefore be questioned.

However it should be kept in mind that this is not a singularity only related to the system of “the world’s largest democracy”, but projects around the world show similarities in the way the projects are being pushed through without considering the interest of a large share of the population. One such example is the clearing of woodland at the Hambacher Forest near Cologne, Germany, for the purpose of surface mining of coal, which does not only involve the displacement of people living nearby but also the destruction of rare ancient forest land as environmentalists point out. Though massive protest is taking place, the eviction continues none the less. The coal mining company’s interest is put above public interest also in Germany – India’s projects are not singular phenomena in this aspect.

### **Interview Partners**

#1: 11/09/2012, Tarnaka, Secunderabad, AP.

Regional Andhra Pradesh coordinator of an Indian NGO.

#2: 11/09/2012, Tarnaka, Secunderabad, AP.

Director Livelihood program of an Indian NGO.

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#3: 11/09/2012, Tarnaka, Secunderabad, AP.

Director Human dignity program of an Indian NGO.

#4: 12/09/2012, Himayat Nagar, Hyderabad, AP.

Sociologist, anthropologist, and author working on Polavaram issue.

#5: 12/09/2012: Himayat Nagar, Hyderabad, AP.

Sociologist working on Polavaram issue.

#6: 13/09/2012: Tarnaka, Secunderabad, AP.

Anthropologist and Former Senior Programme Officer of an Indian NGO

#7: 13/09/2012 and 14/09/2012: Sathupally, Khammam District, AP.

Social worker and representative of a small regional NGO.

#8: 14/09/2012: Sathupally, Khammam District, AP.

Doctor organizing health camps and health campaigns in the dam affected area.

#9: 14/09/2012: Satupally, Khammam District, AP.

Representative of a small regional NGO.

#10: 15/09/2012: Kokonuru, Khammam District, AP.

Interview conducted with a group of eleven people. Including NGO workers, village heads from different surrounding villages, and members of the ARS committee.

#11: 15/09/2012: Pulapagudam village, Khammam District, AP.

Interview with villagers that will be affected by the submergence.

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#12: 15/09/2012: Chinturu, Khammam District, AP.

Phone shop owner living in Chinturu, which will be submerged by the dam.

#13: 16/09/2012: Kuyuguru, Khammam District, AP.

Village head of a village affected by submergence

#14: 16/09/2012: Kaleru village, Khammam District, AP, 500 meters from the Odisha border. Interview with villagers.

#15: 16/09/2012: Mettargumpu village, Khammam District, AP.

Village head, and six other people were attending the meeting in this village of 30 families only reachable by foot.

#16: 16/09/2012: Chinturu, Khammam District, AP.

Social worker and representative of a regional NGO who lives in Chinturu, which will be submerged.

#17: 16/07/2012: Chinturu, Khammam District, AP.

Advocate at the Supreme Court of India, Delhi and Advocate at the State Court of AP, Hyderabad. They are both fighting for better compensation packages for the dam affected people.

#18: 17/09/2012: Chatti village, Khammam District, AP.

Member of Adivasi community living in Chatti village who is involved with the Polavaram protest since 1987.

# 19: 17/09/2012: Konta, Dantewada District, Chhattisgarh.

Clerk in the Konta Government Office.

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#20: 17/09/2012: Konta, Dantewada District, Chhattisgarh.

Doctor and representative of a regional NGO.

#21: 17/09/2012: Komuru village, Khammam District, AP.

Interview with the Komuru village head. Village is very involved in the protest, resistance is strong.

#22: 17/09/2012: Mamilagudem village, Khammam District, AP.

Three local Adivasi women. 132 families are affected by the dam in this village.

#23: 17/09/2012: Chinturu, Khammam District, AP.

Leader in the Adivasi Student Federation, fighting for Adivasi rights. Also organized rallies against the dam.

# 24: 18/09/2012: Gandhi colony, Bhupathipalem Reservoir, Rampachodavaram, East Godavari District, AP. Interview with two people from the resettlement colony. They were displaced for the Bhupathipalem Dam about two years ago.

#25: 18/09/2012: Devipatnam, East Godavari District, AP.

Meeting with three people: an elected Panchayati Member/ whole Mandal President/ Adivasi villager, the VSS chairman and a villager from Kachelooru village. All of them are involved in the protest against the dam.

#26: 18/09/2012: Agraharam village, East Godavari District, AP.

Interview with villagers of this Kondhareddy village that will be submerged. 50 families live here.

#27: 19/09/2012: Nagarpelli, East Godavari District, AP.

Interview with villagers.. Adivasi and non-tribal people live here, 150 families.

(105 Adivasi families / 45 non-tribal families).

# 28: 19/09/2012: Paragasani Padhu, East Godavari District, AP.

Interview with villagers. The village has already been declared officially shifted: some people already live in the new colony, only few are left. They have written many appeals to the government.

#29: 19/09/2012: Diravlenka, East Godavari District, AP.

Interview with villagers. The village has also already been declared shifted. The new colony is 22km. The villagers live split up between the new colony and the old village.

#30: 19/09/2012: Polavaram New Colony, Model Colony, East Godavari District, AP.

Interview with people living in the colony. Three villages are put together here: Paragasani Padhu, Diravlenka and Borigoda. They live here since about 6 years.

# 31: 19/09/2012: Gokavaram, East Godavari District, AP.

Representative of a regional NGO, activist.

#32: 20/09/2012: Rajahmundry, East Godavari, District, AP.

Representative of an NGO, part of the ARS.

#33: 23/09/2012: Rajahmundry, East Godavari, District, AP.

Representative of an NGO and lawyer.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of the dissertation has been to analyse the way large scale water infrastructure projects in India are covered within the media. The research was based on the thesis that the developmental imagination continues to be a prominent feature of discourses on dam projects in India. In this conclusion I would like go back to the questions posed in the introduction and give answer to them.

The literature review in the introduction of the dissertation showed that there is a gap in knowledge in how large dam projects in general, and the National River Linking Project (NRLP) as the world's largest water project in particular, are debated and discursively framed within the Indian context. The dissertation tackled this desideratum by looking at the Indian English-language newspaper reporting on the NRLP as well as on the Ken-Betwa Project and the Polavaram Project, as two projects conducted under the NRLP scheme.

Yet before the dissertation moved towards the media analysis, a brief historical embedding was conducted, in order to provide the necessary background to understand today's narratives used in the debates on large dam building. The chapter on the historical context revealed that the history of the idea of using technology in order to bring "development" to the nation is one that developed in the context of British colonial rule and was especially prominent in the post-independence period under Prime Minister Nehru. Large dams were seen as a way of modernizing the country and its people, as a path to progress. The chapter furthermore revealed that this narrative, though especially prominent under Nehru, did not fade afterwards but that it is one that continues to be employed up until today, for example when current Prime Minister Modi is promising to achieve progress, prosperity and happiness through large dam building.



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After providing the historical background in Chapter 1, the media analysis was conducted in Chapter 2. In a first quantitative step of analysis the four most prominent narratives within the media discourses on the three projects were identified. These included the debates on ecological and environment concerns, inter-state disputes, irrigation and agriculture issues as well as the issue of social costs. For the qualitative analysis, a fifth category was introduced, which specifically looked at the role of political stakeholders and their appearance within the media and their narratives used, as this perspective was especially enlightening with regard to how politicians use the media to influence the discourse and to influence opinion formation on the water infrastructure policies and with regard to the narratives employed in this context.

In relation to the results of the media analysis, it can be said that in general there is a critical stance taken by many journalists especially with regard to the massive environmental consequences of the projects concerned and also with regard to the social consequences. Yet there are also responses by the government on the issue that the media often publishes uncommented. It is in particular Water Minister Uma Bharti who, as the analysis showed, takes up a very prominent role within the media debates, especially when it comes to debates on the Ken-Betwa Project. The way she employs the media renders visible to which extend questions of nation-building and dam construction continue to be linked. Bharti employs the narration of “dams bringing progress to the nation” continuously and makes the project a very personal issue by for example threatening to go on hunger strike if the project is delayed and by pointing out that those that are against the project are in essence acting “anti-national”. Any delay in construction is according to her a “national crime”.

This “anti-national” narrative results in a fear of being branded as such – a fear that is very visible in the way the projects are reported upon and in the way

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opponents address critique. Also the later chapter on the fieldwork in dam building areas showed that many local activists avoid positioning themselves directly against the projects out of fear of being branded “anti-national” which for NGOs can for example lead to a prohibition of receiving funding from outside of India. Also an article published by Shah in *Economic and Political Weekly* (EPW) renders visible how closely dam debates and nation-building debates continue to be linked together, when he describes how by his critique of the current Central Water Commission structures he “personally [has] been dubbed ‘anti-dam, antidevelopment, and anti-national’” (M. Shah 2018).

Yet there are also fractures within the narrative of one nation that is being built, as reflected in the manifold conflicts between the federal states on the issue of water sharing that are reflected within the reporting. Especially those states not benefiting from the interlinking refuse participation, which brings up debates on nationalizing the water resources, instead of the current status under which is water management is a federal state task. Though no action in this direction has taken place so far, it would be a huge step away from the federal autonomies towards the centralization of the Indian nation. The NRLP with its geographical layout of connecting all parts of India to a large water grid, can already be seen as such a movement – emphasizing the whole countries communion rather than presenting (mostly likely more effective) local solutions.

Interestingly, the analysis has also shown that the narrative of nation-building works very similarly to an idea of federal-state building. To explain: Uma Bharti speaking on the issue of the Ken-Betwa Link always refers to the whole Indian nation as her point of reference. Delaying the project is to her a crime against the nation. In the case of the Polavaram Project the reference point however is a different one: not the nation is meant to be built by its construction, but the federal state. As much as, and even more, Bharti appears in the reporting on the Ken-

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Betwa, it is Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh N. Chandrababu Naidu who has a say on the Polavaram Project. The local entity, the federal state is what Naidu refers to when “selling” the idea of the project.

In this context it is not about bringing progress and development to the nation but to the federal state. He is to bring a bright and prosperous future to the state. Catchphrases used by him such as building "the lifeline of the state" and making the state "drought-free", appear over and again in the articles either by citing him or as phrases adopted from him by the journalists. Naidu also repeatedly emphasizes the technological side of development thereby recalling images used in the post-independence area. Both the narratives employed by Bharti and Naidu, though differing in their point of reference, are deeply informed by a developmental imagination. To come back to Zachariah, as cited in the introduction, it can be said that the developmental imagination that can be found in the narratives both Bharti and Naidu are employing within the analysed newspaper articles, can be seen as enabling the process of legitimizing developmentalism. The results from the analysis therefore support the dissertation's initial thesis that the developmental imagination continues to be a prominent feature in how dam projects are discursively framed.

Within the dissertation, there is a second narrative that appeared, though often less obvious than the one on nation- / (federal) state-building. It is a narrative that evokes the image of the “poor Adivasi communities” that might actually be better off once resettled. Many newspaper articles especially with regard to the Ken-Betwa Project reported on how backward, drought-prone, and poverty-ridden the areas concerned are. They imply the idea that the regions can be better off once dams are constructed and “development” is brought to these areas. Yet, the communities do hardly get a chance to speak for themselves. If the communities' visions for “development” are in any way similar to those of the government is

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very questionable, but it is also an issue mostly not raised and their voices are covered in only few of the articles concerned (most of the exceptions that do give voice to the local communities are on the Polavaram Project). In the case of the Polavaram Project it is for example Odishan politicians that claim to be speaking for the affected communities, but they do not seem to speak with them or let them speak for themselves.

Bharti and Modi are both quoted within the press pointing out that resettlement will actually not harm but benefit affected communities. Also Supreme Court judgements, as analysed in the Chapter 3 on local perspectives, reflect this positions. Yet as also especially Chapter 3 revealed, this does not seem to hold in a reality check. Resettlement is mostly disastrous for the communities and though the Indian constitution does provide legal protection to communities affected by such projects, these laws are largely ignored in practice. Resettlement policies are an issue that, as the analysis has shown, is also taken up within the media discourses. Repeatedly the government's bad reputation in handling rehabilitations is pointed out by journalists. The media analysis yet shows that there is a large gap in knowledge in who is actually going to be affected by the projects – the numbers cited show great discrepancies.

The last chapter of the dissertation was based on fieldwork conducted in the Polavaram Dam construction area. This local perspective provided insights into how much more complex the issue of resettlement is than the media provided insights into. This chapter not only looked at the example of the Polavaram Model Colony, one of the early resettlement colonies constructed, but also provided insights into how resettlement effects the communities by change in social structures, new environments, lack of access to formerly available resources and the consequences of being forced to shift from subsistence agriculture to a life based on day labour activities. It also highlighted how legal provisions existing

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for the protection of the communities are circumvented, exclusion of the local communities in the decision making processes takes place and how developmentalism in practise excludes those communities most vulnerable.

“Progress” is supposed to be achieved via transforming a natural habitat, a rural area inhabited by people often hardly involved in monetary economy, into a man-made symbol of power. Just as the natural environments are thereby framed as not being “developed” (yet), the same is done to the people. The data on the project clarify that local communities are not included in any stage of the planning of the Polavaram Dam. Decisions are made for the affected communities; not with them. By doing so the people are framed as not being capable of knowing what is good for them. The government creates “displaceable objects” out of its citizens, in the interest of the state, and in the interest of “progress”. The affected people are not recognized as independent subjects who are eligible as negotiates. A clear preference for a certain type of citizen is therefore also included in the discourse on the project: Those still living “backward” lives are finally meant to be integrated into a “modern” Indian society. Not only the environment is supposed to be modernized to serve the needs of a “modern” India, also the country’s citizens are meant to be transformed into a more “modern” version of themselves. Within the developmental imagination the communities are thought to be striving for change, achieving prosperity and happiness and access to the “modern” world through the development project. Yet developmentalism, and its aligned policies and projects, does not seem in any way achieve what is imagined; but rather its opposite. Existing power structures and societal mechanisms of exclusion are perpetuated and reinforced.

A project of such enormous dimensions as the river-interlinking scheme seems like a prime example of demonstrating the mastery of “mankind” over nature. The way the project is being forced through, despite manifold opposition

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demonstrates that there is more meaning behind the project than the alleged benefits. It is also a project of demonstration of power and technological know-how. Even though many alternative options exist and the NRLP plan continues to be highly disputed, the government is pushing through this project. This adherence to gigantic projects is a message not only to the citizens of India and a means of nation building within the country, it also has to be considered on a more international scale. To the world outside, the project should demonstrate that the Indian nation is capable of conducting such technologically advanced huge projects. “Modernity” is supposed to be brought to the nation by the project. Smaller scale projects, even though they would create the same outcome whilst bringing a lot less displacement, would not be able to convey this symbolic meaning. It especially with regard to India’s neighbour China, to which a great competition exists on many levels and itself infamous for large scale projects such as the Three Gorges Dam Project, that this type of projects must also be read.

After having looked at the conclusions drawn from the dissertation, let us look at how further research could dock on to the findings. As addressed in the beginning of the dissertation, the research is limited by a choice of language: only English-language newspapers were considered within the analysis. Further research could for example build on the findings of the dissertation and point out how the discourses might possibly differ between regions and language in the Indian context.

Further research could also be suggested for different projects and areas within India. It is for example highly interesting to see how India’s North-East is about to become ‘India’s power house’ (cf. i.e. Das 2013) with 168 dams planned on the Brahmaputra river. The power generated will be transferred nearly completely to places around Delhi for industrial purposes. The region and the people suffering from the construction therefore will have no gains from it at all. As resistance is

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rather high in the North-East against the projects, further research on how media reporting within this geographical area discursively frames the dam building activities, would surely provide interesting insights, especially in the backdrop of a region, in which context already the term “internal colonialism” has been used – implying that the area is exploited for its natural resources whilst benefits are created for a totally different area within the nation. The interpretation of “internal colonialism” would point out that not only the North-East is in the periphery of the India nation and not represented in the rest of the state, its resources and people are exploited for the benefit of the centre whilst continuously being marginalised. Lastly, it would surely be of great insight to see how the narratives, policies and actions develop in the coming years and to re-conducted the analysis in a few years time.

The NRLP is part of a policy currently dominating the Indian politics that seeks to “develop” the country through a whole set of large scale infrastructure projects. One such example is also the Char Dham National Highway under construction in Uttarakhand. The Char Dham National Highway Project and the NRLP are united by the fact that they give rise to questions of environmental concerns, rehabilitation measures and the more broader question of what kind of development is it that India wants to strive for? Modi delivering the inaugural speech at the World Government Summit 2018, opened in Dubai February 2018 said:

Some people are using technology to make bombs and missile. We have to understand that we must use technology for humankind’s development, not for its destruction. The cost of misuse of technology is very high (Mojib 2018).

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Yet, as this dissertation has shown, the question of what serves “humankind’s development” and what may not lies in the eye of the beholder. Most certainly, as the analysis has shown, a large share of people affected by the NRLP’s construction would take a different perspective on what kind of “development” they wish for, than Modi does.



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